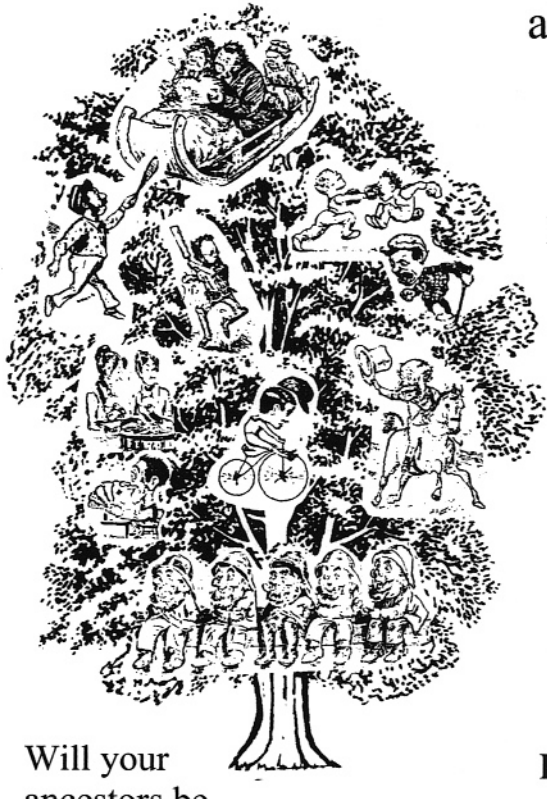
Researching English & Welsh Civil Registration Records...

by Dr. Penelope Christensen

Obtaining birth, marriage and death certificates is an essential element of good genealogical research. It is not always an easy process.



Will your ancestors be remembered?

Here are the practical details needed to understand the system, use the indexes and find and interpret the certificates.

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Author's Page

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She has published many textbooks on methodology, Family History Center resources, as well British and Scandinavian research. These are used as texts for the Internet courses offered by the University of Toronto in partnership with the National Institute for Genealogical Studies.

Dr. Christensen acts as a volunteer at the Family History Centers in Burnaby and Abbotsford, where she is the staff trainer. She has also served as the English Group Leader for the BC Genealogical Society.

List of Books by the Same Author

Finding Your English & Welsh Ancestors
Finding Your Irish Ancestors
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Finding Your Scottish Ancestors
How Do I Prove It ?
Let's Get Organized
Names in Genealogy: Their Origin & Meaning
Organization for One-Name Studies
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Organizing a Genealogical Library
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Research at the Family History Center
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Researching English & Welsh Civil Registration
Researching English Occupations – Civilian Services
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Researching English Parish Registers
Researching English Poor Law & Parish Chest Records
Researching English Probate Records
Tips for Your Genealogical Trip Abroad, Including Preparing for Salt Lake
Using Register Offices for English & Welsh Certificates
What Did They Do ?

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INTRODUCTION

This book is aimed at Family Historians who wish to understand the system of civil registration in England, Wales, Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. It will be of particular use to those who are personally unable to visit The Family Records Centre (formerly St. Catherine's House) in London to search the indexes and order civil registration certificates. This means the vast majority of us!

The national indexes kept there are now widely available on microfilm or microfiche from their origins in 1837 until 1983. This is accomplished through the generous services of the worldwide Family History Centers run by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and also at numerous libraries and archives in Britain and elsewhere.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has established the most important genealogical library system in the world to assist its members, and others, to identify their ancestors. Since the 1930s they have been microfilming national and local, civil and religious, records all over the world. The master copies of these films are protected from the elements and natural disasters in deep vaults carved out of the granite mountains near Salt Lake City, Utah.

The Family History Library™ in Salt Lake City houses the collection of films, fiches, papers, CDs and books and is open to the public at no charge. In addition, a network of over 3600 branches, called Family History Centers (FHCs) operates through the generosity of LDS church members.

Use of FHC facilities, which include dozens of indexes essential for research, is free. Patrons may borrow microforms (films or fiches) of most original documents and books held at Salt Lake City at their local FHC for a nominal fee, which covers postage and duplication. You may want to consult the book *Research at the Family History Center* in this program for details on how to utilize the indexes, computer facilities, and other procedures at the FHCs. All genealogists are most grateful to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormons) for extending the privilege of access to their collection to everyone.

After exhausting family sources, the main sources of primary evidence for British genealogy are:

- Civil registration of birth, marriage and death
- Census records
- Parish registers of christening, marriage and burial
- Probate (wills, administrations, guardianship etc.)

These original records, as they were made *at the time of the event* and *by someone who was there,* are the most reliable ones upon which to base a pedigree. The four main original records are available through any FHC, as are hundreds of others. Thus the FHCs are the most convenient resource facility for most genealogists in the world, excepting those folks with unlimited budgets and unrestricted time schedules who can actually travel to each archive that they need in the book of their research.

Public, university, specialist and genealogical society libraries also house useful materials, each being restricted in its scope; serious researchers should be acquainted with those relevant to their areas of interest. The FHCs affiliated with The Family History Library in Salt Lake City hold a pre-eminent position for the genealogist because of the breadth and strength of their holdings worldwide.

Those whose interests take them beyond the borders of England & Wales will find other books on researching *Irish Ancestors* and *Scottish Ancestors* as well as many other nationalities providing solid starting points for their research.

Those who want to explore the history of the civil registration system through the enabling Acts of Parliament are advised to consult the excellent book by Muriel Nissel, *People Count: A History of the General Register Office.*

Note: When a LDS (Latter-day Saints), or more properly a GSU (Genealogical Society of Utah), fiche number is quoted it always starts with a 6 and has 7 digits. It will be followed by a number in parentheses indicating the number of fiches in that set, for example 6026374 (11). Sometimes there is a series of fiche sets and the total number of fiches is then quoted, for example 6020392-411 (21).

When ordering fiches in to a Family History Center it is essential to know this quantity as you are charged per fiche. Fiche numbers and numbers of fiches in the set are found in the Family History Library Catalogue. All fiches stay at the Family History Center that ordered them, they are not returned to Salt Lake City.

The Request for Photocopies form (Form 31768) can be obtained free from the Family History Library in Salt Lake City and is indispensable for obtaining inexpensive copies of documents.

My thanks go to Brian Lawson for checking the Isle of Man information, to Al Gibson for helpful advice on Guernsey records, and to Rev. John Charnell for his counsel on Anglican church matters. Thanks also to Paul Duguay, Donna Fraser, James P. Jones, Lilyon Lunty, Muriel Moffat, Esther Perry, and June Playden for allowing me to use their certificates as examples here.

List of Abbreviations

ACR	Adopted Childrens Register & Adoption Contact Register
BMD	Birth, Marriage and Death (Civil Registration)
CD	Compact Disk
CMB	Christening, Marriage & Burial (Church Ceremonies)
DOA	Dead on Arrival
DSS	Department of Social Security
FHC	Family History Center, one of 3500 branches of LDS FHL in Salt Lake City
FHL	Family History Library run by LDS church in Salt Lake City
FHLC	Family History Library Catalogue
FRC	Family Records Centre, main London office of GRO
GRO	General Register Office headed by Registrar General.
GSU	Genealogical Society of Utah, the branch of the LDS church that, among other things, does the microfilming
IGI	International Genealogical Index
LDS	The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
NHS	National Health Service
NORCAP	National Association for Counselling Adoptees & their Parents
ONS	Office for National Statistics (formerly OPCS)
OPCS	Office of Population Censuses & Surveys (now ONS)
PLU	Poor Law Union
PRO	Public Record Office (the national archives)
RD	Registration District under a Superintendent Registrar, to whom we send for inexpensive certificates. The RD names are those used in the indexes. An RD may have several Sub-districts supervised by Registrars.
RD	Rural District
RSD	Rural Sanitary District
UD	Urban District
USD	Urban Sanitary District

THE CIVIL REGISTRATION SYSTEM IN ENGLAND & WALES

Although the original proposal for a system of civil registration in England & Wales had been made as far back as 1753, it did not actually commence until 1 July 1837, just 11 days after Victoria ascended the throne. Thus birth, marriages and death certificates can only be obtained for events from that date onwards. A short history of the development of the system of civil registration is given by Jane Cox in *St. Catherine's House: How It All Began.*

North Americans are more familiar with the term Vital Statistics but are cautioned that this term means something entirely different to the British!

The General Register Office was housed in Somerset House in the Strand until 1974 when it moved to St. Catherine's House at the corner of Kingsway and Aldwych. Here it became part of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) and a postal department was opened in Southport, Lancashire. In 1997 the public facility moved to the Family Records Centre in Islington where it now comes under the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and shares a building with an outreach arm of the Public Record Office.

The Registrar General in London oversees the work of about 600 District Superintendent Registrars. Each of them has several local Registrars who cover sub-districts (Chart 1). The local Superintendent Registrars are given their instructions from the national office, but their facilities, salaries and receipts are managed by their local county or city government. It is to the local Superintendent Registrars that we send for certificates.

CHART 1:
The Three Levels of Registrars for England & Wales

REGISTRAR GENERAL in London is responsible for the GRO (General Register Office), now a part of the ONS (Office for National Statistics) He or she supervises
SUPERINTENDENT REGISTRARS of the DISTRICTS shown in the indexes and on the maps, who in turn supervise
REGISTRARS who each cover a SUB-DISTRICT

There is a national office with a walk-in facility in London at:

The Family Records Centre
1 Myddelton Street
Islington, London EC1R 1UW, England

and a postal department in Southport at:

General Register Office
P.O. Box 2, Southport
Merseyside, England PR8 2JD
Telephone: 0151 471 4800
Website: www.statistics.gov.uk

and a newsletter at
www.pro.gov.uk/about/frc/newsletters/default

At the FRC in London they also have a Scottish Link for which you pay a fee for access, and a free computerized index to births in Northern Ireland from 1922-93. Civil registration in the Isle of Man and Channel Islands comes under local control, not through the English system.

You should find some material at the:

Public Record Office
Ruskin Avenue, Kew, Surrey TW9 4DU
E-mail: enquiry@pro.gov.uk
Website: www.pro.gov.uk

What is Available

In England & Wales indexes covering most, but not all, of the events are available from 1837 to about a year ago. Anyone can purchase any certificate without proving a descendancy or relationship, although there are sensible precautions regarding births less than 50 years old to prevent their use in fraud by impersonation.

A similar situation occurs in the Isle of Man and Guernsey, with the important addition of the earlier registrations being available on microfilm as well as the indexes. For Jersey there are not only very limited facilities for personal searches, but none of the indexes or registrations are available in microform. You therefore have to pay for both searches and certificates.

Counties Districts, & Parishes

There are several numbered Regions throughout England & Wales, each divided into many named Registration Districts. The boundaries of the Registration Districts (RDs) were based on those of the Poor Law Union (PLUs). Readers are cautioned that they were sometimes named after a larger town, but many derived their names from the old county divisions (hundreds, wapentakes, lathes, rapes or sokes) or after a village where the Union Workhouse happened to be located. These names are not always familiar household names today and some can be downright misleading.

Amongst the latter one should mention West Derby which is a suburb of Liverpool, Lancashire and nowhere near Derbyshire. Another one that confounds newcomers is the registration district of Bootle, Cumberland, which is often mistaken for the suburb of Liverpool. And then there is St. Ives, a district covering parts of Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire, but easily confused with the more well-known holiday town in Cornwall. East Preston is in Sussex not Lancashire, and St. Thomas is located around Exeter in Devon, rather than any of the other dozens of places by that name. In addition there are two each of the following named districts:

Bradford	Wilts and Yorks
Newcastle	Northumbs and Staffs
Richmond	Surrey and Yorks
Stow	Gloucs and Suffolk
Wellington	Salop (Shropshire) and Somerset
Westbury	Gloucs and Wilts
and three St. George's in various parts of London	

In early registers Hull is also sometimes indexed as Kingston-upon-Hull which leads to confusion with Kingston, Surrey. Wise family historians check the map and the regional volume number.

During the period of greatest interest to researchers, there have been three major re-distributions of districts: 1852, 1946 and 1965. In addition there have been hundreds of local amalgamations and divisions of territories due to population changes.

So your family, although living in the same house, may start off in one district, be transferred to another, and end up in a third one, simply because of distributional changes. It pays to find out the names of the districts to which your village, or area of a city, belonged over the course of time.

Three maps of the named Registration Districts for England & Wales for the periods 1837-1851, 1852-1946, and 1946-1965 respectively, are available from:

The Institute of Heraldic & Genealogical Studies
Northgate, Canterbury
Kent, England CT1 1BA

and are posted at some Family History Centers and libraries. They show the counties and the Registration Districts labelled by name and volume number. A list of these numbers and their county equivalents is included here in Charts 2, 3 and 4. Please note the different styles of numbers used for each period:

- 1837-1851 Upper case Roman numerals
- 1852-1946 Lower case Arabic numerals
- 1946-1965 Upper case Arabic numerals

Alphabetical lists of Districts within each area during the different periods are included in the latest edition of the author's book *Using Register Offices for English & Welsh Certificates*. The primary purpose of that volume is to give an Old-to-New Registration District key, so that you can find the present district address for an old district found in the indexes.

It is essential to recognize that the Registration Districts listed in the indexes each contain dozens of parishes, and that large cities may have several Registration Districts within them. An alphabetical, county-by-county listing of over 18,000 parishes and their relevant Registration Districts can be found in the author's *Parishes & Registration Districts in England & Wales*.

CHART 2: Registration District Codes for England & Wales 1837-1851

I	London & Middlesex
II	London & Middlesex
III	London & Middlesex
IV	London & Surrey
V	Kent
VI	Beds, Berks, Bucks, & Herts
VII	Hants & Sussex
VIII	Dorset, Hants & Wilts
IX	Cornwall & Devon
X	Devon & Somerset
XI	Gloucs, Somerset & Warwicks
XII	Essex & Suffolk
XIII	Norfolk & Suffolk
XIV	Cambs, Hunts & Lincs
XV	Leics, Northants, Notts & Rutland
XVI	Oxon, Staffs & Warwicks
XVII	Staffs
XVIII	Gloucs, Shropshire (Salop), Staffs, Warwicks & Worcs
XIX	Cheshire, Derbys & Flint
XX	Lancs
XXI	Lancs & Yorks
XXII	Yorks
XXIII	Yorks
XXIV	Durham & Yorks
XXV	Cumbs, Lancs, Northumbs & Westmorland
XXVI	Brecon, Carmarthen, Glamorgan, Herefords, Mon, Pembs, Radnor, Shropshire (Salop)
XXVII	Anglesey, Caernarvon, Cardigan, Denbigh, Flint, Merioneth & Montgomery

CHART 3:
Registration District Codes for England & Wales 1852-1946

1a	London & Middlesex
1b	London & Middlesex
1c	London & Middlesex
1d	London, Kent & Surrey
2a	Kent & Surrey
2b	Hants & Sussex
2c	Berks & Hants
3a	Berks, Bucks, Herts, Mddx & Oxon
3b	Beds, Cambs, Hunts, Notts & Suffolk
4a	Essex & Suffolk
4b	Norfolk
5a	Dorset & Wilts
5b	Devon
5c	Cornwall & Somerset
6a	Gloucs, Herefords & Shropshire (Salop)
6b	Staffs, Warwicks & Worcs
6c	Warwicks & Worcs
6d	Warwicks
7a	Leics, Lincs & Rutland
7b	Derbys & Notts
8a	Cheshire
8b	Lancs
8c	Lancs
8d	Lancs
8e	Lancs
9a	Yorks
9b	Yorks

9c	Yorks
9d	Yorks
10a	Durham
10b	Cumbs, Northumbs & Westmorland
11a	Glamorgan, Mon, Pembs
11b	Anglesey, Brecon, Denbigh, Flint, Montgomery & Radnor

CHART 4:
Registration District Codes for England & Wales 1946-1965

1A	Cumberland, Durham, Yorkshire
1B	Northumberland, Westmorland, Yorkshire
2A	Yorkshire
2B	Yorkshire
2C	Yorkshire
2D	Yorkshire
3A	Derbyshire, Leicestershire
3B	Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire
3C	Nottinghamshire, Rutland
4A	Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex
4B	Hertfordshire, Huntingdonshire, Norfolk, Suffolk
5A	East London, Essex
5B	Kent, Middlesex
5C	Kent, Middlesex, Surrey
5D	Kent, Middlesex, Surrey
5E	Middlesex
5F	Middlesex
6A	Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Dorset
6B	Hampshire, Oxfordshire

7A	Cornwall, Devon
7B	Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire
7C	Dorset, Somerset, Wiltshire
8A	Anglesey, Brecon, Caernarvon, Cardigan, Carmarthen, Denbigh, Flint
8B	Glamorgan
8C	Carmarthen, Merioneth, Monmouth, Montgomery, Pembroke, Radnor
9A	Herefordshire, Shropshire (Salop)
9B	Staffordshire
9C	Warwickshire
9D	Worcestershire
10A	Cheshire, Derbyshire
10B	Lancashire (A–B)
10C	Lancashire (C–La)
10D	Lancashire (Le–Lu)
10E	Lancashire (M–N)
10F	Lancashire (O–Z)

Registration Districts, which were used for both civil registration and census purposes, overlap historic county boundaries. This means that one district can contain places in more than one county. It is also possible that parts of one village can be in two, (and occasionally three) districts. The researcher should *never assume that the boundaries of one type of jurisdiction are the same for another type.* Other problems with place names to watch for include:

- There are frequently several parishes of the same name, even within one county. For example there are three Hintons in Gloucestershire alone, and there seem to be zillions of Ashtons, Newtons and Newtowns all over the country. When one includes smaller settlements the situation is even more confusing. For example, 34 counties boast a place called Coldharbour, whilst there are 40 Mount Pleasant's in Yorkshire alone!
- Some places have had more than one name over the course of time, and spellings of place names have varied during the centuries.
- There will always be problems due to similarity of names and to pronunciation variations in different dialects e.g. in Northumberland there are 4 places that are hard to distinguish by ear: Ryal, Ryehill, Rye Hill and Ryle. If your grandmother only *heard* it from her grandmother, then you would be wise to consider *all* possibilities.

The researcher is wise to cast a wide net and the use of a good gazetteer will be necessary in some cases.

BIRTH, MARRIAGE & DEATH and CHRISTENING, MARRIAGE & BURIAL

It may be wise to take a moment here to distinguish between the terms BMD and CMB used by family historians. BMD refers to the civil requirements of birth, marriage and death whereas CMB refers to the church ceremonies of christening, marriage and burial. The researcher is cautioned to use these appropriately otherwise confusion will indubitably arise.

Birth & Christening

Birth precedes christening, but not always by a few days or weeks as is commonly supposed. There are millions of Baptists, Mormons and others who feel that this ordinance may only be made by those old enough to understand the obligations they are taking on. Plenty of other folks were not christened until later in life, some on their death beds! Sometimes the age of the older person is noted on the christening register but more often it is not. The genealogist cannot, therefore, assume that a christening date is close to the date of birth. For different reasons some, such as atheists or Quakers, are never christened and thus no record could be found.

Marriages

In the vast majority of cases the marriage occurred only once and thus there is only one date and place. Church marriages since 1837 were accompanied by the creation of two official copies of the register, and another for the couple to take home with them. The one signed by the couple and their witnesses remained in church hands and eventually finds a home in the county archives.

The book of copies was passed to the local Superintendent Registrar when it became full. Large parishes will have many books; for others, one register can easily cover fifty years or more. For example in 1998, the Taunton Registrar had still not received approximately nine registers dating from 1837 that were still in use locally (Foster). In addition, each quarter this official was supposed to make the rounds of the churches in his district and collect copies of the previous three months' weddings. For civil marriages there is only one entry made at the Register Office itself.

In some cases couples were married twice. This could occur for a variety of reasons:

- Between 1837 and 1898 the only legal marriages were those in the Church of England, Jewish and Quaker ceremonies, or the Register Office. Catholics and Protestant nonconformists sometimes chose to have a ceremony in their own church or chapel as well as a register office marriage.

- If a mistake had occurred in the recording of the original ceremony then a second one may have been performed, sometimes many years later, to ensure the legality of the union and the legitimacy of children.

- If a couple had first been married unlawfully then they may later choose to marry again when the former impediment had been removed. For example a bigamous marriage might be redone after the first spouse died.

- Some couples married much later in life after having had their children. Various reasons account for this, some of them pecuniary. For example, half a million people became eligible for the new non-contributory pensions introduced on 1st January 1909. The rate for single men was 5/- per week whilst that for married men was 7/6d. If you can not find a certain marriage try 1909! (O'Sullivan)

Deaths & Burials

Death usually precedes burial (there are known exceptions!) by a few days or a couple of weeks. Thus most burial dates are close to the date of death. The researcher must not assume that this is so, however, as exceptions include:

- Bodies not found until long after the date of death.
- Bodies washed up on the seashore.
- Bodies left for medical research.
- Reburials from another grave site or another place.
- Bodies returned home from a death far away.
- Bodies kept for several months or years to ensure that live burial did not occur.
- After an inquest.

USING INDEXES

Availability of Indexes

The indexes of births, marriages and deaths for England & Wales, (but *not* including the Isle of Man or Channel Islands) are widely available worldwide. The whole set from 1837 to 1983 is in book form at the Family Record Centre in London, with a fiche set able to be booked (at the Scottish Link desk) for use by those unable to handle the books. Fiche sets from 1837 to fairly recently are at many major libraries and archives in Britain and elsewhere. The Family History Library in Salt Lake City has them to 1983 and sends them worldwide to any of its 3600 affiliates, the Family History Centers, that order them.

If you'd like to buy your own set of fiches from the GRO they are approximately £24 per year per event (birth, marriage or death). You can also purchase CDs of 1984-1996 at approximately £50 per year per event. At these prices the Family History Center charge of 30¢ (Canadian) per fiche, combined with a collective effort by a group of local family historians, makes a lot of economic sense!

The birth index books are bound in red and birth certificates are also red; green is used for marriage index books and certificates, and black for deaths. To find out what indexes are available at a public library near you, (or near where you will be visiting) in the UK and Ireland, check out *Familia* at

www.earl.org.uk/familia/ which is the Internet directory of family history resources held in public libraries in Britain. The indexes from 1984 to about 12 months ago are in annual compilations, (not in quarters), on computer at the Family Records Centre or on CD.

The Family History Library in Salt Lake City has the indexes on 1318 films from 1837 to 1980 which may be borrowed temporarily or indefinitely at any Family History Center. Those up to 1903 are on the wide (35mm) films, after that they are on narrow (16mm) films which require a higher magnification lens to view. They also have them on 21,537 fiches from 1837 to 1983 and these stay forever in the FHC which orders copies of them. Larger FHCs that have many patrons researching in Britain may have long runs of the indexes on indefinite loan.

Indexes for Lundy Island

Births on Lundy, a tiny and somewhat autonomous island in the Bristol Channel, were treated as foreign entries and the indexes are in RG 43 at the Public Record Office.

Indexes for Isle of Man

There are a total of 45 microfilms of indexes and certificates of births from 1821-1964, and marriages and deaths from 1849-1964. However, registration did not become compulsory until 1878 for births and deaths, and 1888 for marriages. The Adopted Children Register was commenced in 1928. The film numbers may be found by looking in the catalogue (FHLC) under: FHLC – LOCALITY – ISLE OF MAN – CIVIL REGISTRATION and CIVIL REGISTRATION – INDEXES.

These indexes are calendered, having all surnames of one letter together but not in strict alphabetical order, and all the years in order together for one letter. Since the island is small anyway, these are easy and quick to read.

Indexes for Channel Islands

Note that some Channel Islands events were treated as foreign and can be found in the RG material in the Public Record Office.

Guernsey

Microfilms of indexes and registrations of Births and Marriages 1840-1966, and Deaths 1840-1963 are available.

The starting dates on the various islands in this group are:

- Guernsey, Jethou and Herm 1840
- Alderney 1850
- Sark births 1925, marriages 1919, deaths 1915

The film numbers may be found by looking in the catalogue (FHLC) under:
FHLC – LOCALITY – CHANNEL ISLANDS – GUERNSEY – CIVIL REGISTRATION and CIVIL REGISTRATION – INDEXES.

Under the latter are 5 Parish Register Printouts 1840-75 for Forest Guernsey, St. Martin, St. Pierre Du Blois, St. Saviour and St. Pierre Port. The archives will supply a list of church addresses for Anglican marriages earlier than 1919. The birth index on film has English headings and has been most helpfully sorted into surnames, thus searching is really simple. Marriage and Death indexes on film may be headed in French or English and are calendered, not in strict alphabetical order. All the years are grouped in order together for one letter and since the population is small, these are easy and quick to read.

Jersey

There are very limited facilities for personal searches in Jersey, and none of the indexes are available in microform.

Different Editions of the Indexes

As you search the indexes note which editions you are using; you could see any of the following editions (Litton 1998, and my personal observations).

- The 1035 35mm GSU films covering the first 46 years (1837-1903) were made starting in 1968 from the earlier handwritten editions up to 1865 and the typed ones from 1866 to 1903. As the early handwritten ones have since been retyped without checking, many errors were introduced. Thus these films are more reliable than the new typed ones now available at the Family Records Centre in London.

- The GRO microfilmed the then-current editions of handwritten pre-1866 and typed later ones (including any handwritten amendments) in the 1980s. Thus these are the same originals as the GSU ones but *with the addition of manual amendments*; it is my experience that GRO films are not as complete nor as sharply focussed as GSU ones.

- A typed copy of the pre-1866 indexes was prepared in the 1970s and it is unlikely that it was checked thoroughly. It also *only gave initials for second names* and is therefore less useful. This retyped pre-1866 portion, presumably together with the then-current, manually amended, later indexes to 1983 was used for the fiche edition. These were filmed by the GRO in 1993 and comprise 21,537 fiches in 1757 sets.

- They are available to purchase (for a steep price) in Britain, and provided to the GSU for the Family History Centers. It has now been revealed that this filming was very sloppy—dozens and dozens of pages were missed, and the numerals are frequently impossible to read (Foster).

- The GSU also filmed a set of 283 16mm films covering 1904-1983. This filming is more complete and definitely clearer to read than the fiches.

An attempt has been made in Chart 5 to briefly summarize the different editions available. The situation is more complex than this but the chart serves to remind us of the major discrepancies.

CHART 5:
Availability of Microforms of Older Civil Registration Indexes on Microform

Dates	Film or Fiches	Made By	Notes
1837-1865	35mm films	GSU Thus at FHCs	Original handwritten ones. No amendments. Better quality filming.
	35mm films	GRO	Original handwritten ones but contain amendments. Poor quality filming.
	Fiches	GRO	Typed copy (many errors) with initials for middle names, and amendments. Poor quality filming, many missing pages causing an estimated 1 in 600 names to be omitted.
1866-1903	35mm films	GSU Thus at FHCs	Original typed or printed ones. No amendments. Better quality filming.
	35mm films	GRO	Original typed or printed ones but with amendments. Poor quality filming.
	Fiches	GRO	Original typed or printed ones but with amendments. Poor quality filming, many missing pages causing an estimated 1 in 600 names to be omitted.

1904-1983	16mm films	GSU Thus at FHCs	Original typed or printed with amendments done no further than 1986. Better quality filming.
	Fiches	GRO & copied by GSU for use at FHCs	Original typed or printed with amendments done to 1993. Poor quality filming, many missing pages causing an estimated 1 in 600 names to be omitted.

In the FHLC these indexes are found under ENGLAND – CIVIL REGISTRATION – INDEXES. The films are the 4th item, and the fiches the 5th item.

So the films, especially the older GSU films are more complete and of better quality than the fiches *with the exception of any amendments*. This is what we currently have to work with and its insufficiencies are well known (Armstrong, Camp 1999, 2002-2, Foster). The solution is not a re-filming of what is at the GRO, but a complete district-by-district indexing of the *original entries* held in the districts, together with the provision of photocopies of the originals, since they are the only primary evidence.

The Quarters

Each annual index is divided into four separate, quarterly indexes, thus events registered in January, February and March 1867 are in the Mar 1867 Index. Events are entered according to *the date that they were registered*, which may have been up to 6 weeks after the date of the event itself. There are also many late entries that were registered up to many years after the event, often identifiable by a written insertion on a page or by different kinds of volume and page numbers.

Remember to search each quarter, (March, June, September and December or 1Q, 2Q, 3Q and 4Q for short), and keep track of which you have searched. A general index search form is included in the book.

Written, Typed & Printed Styles

The early indexes up to 1865 are handwritten on vellum. These are gradually being replaced with typewritten editions although a few had been retyped prior to filming by the GSU. From 1866 the indexes are usually typewritten or printed. Thus for the early years one typically finds that three films are needed to cover all the letters of one quarter. For typed indexes this is reduced to one or two films per quarter, and for the printed registers all quarters are usually contained on one film. When reading films be certain that you check *all quarters* on each film, not just the first one!

Understanding Index Collation

How It Was Done

Within each district quarterly collection of transcript pages of registrations sent to London, the sub-districts were arranged in a specific order; the same pattern for each book each quarter. For the marriages, the register office transcripts were always added last, so will be the highest numbered pages for that district. When the Registrar General received all of the collections of pages for a volume such as 1c (Bethnal Green, Holborn, Poplar, Shoreditch etc. in the East End of London), he put them in a standard order of districts. The pages were then numbered and bound into a volume. The result is that any particular district and sub-district usually occupies roughly the same page numbers for each volume, with a little seasonal variation.

When you look at a large number of references for your family in one district over several years you notice that most are within a limited page number range. Now you know why! This information can be very useful to you, for example:

- It can often help you define which entry of two similar ones in a district is likely to be the one for your sub-district and district.

- It can also assist in transcribing digits that are unclear on microforms.

One sees the occasional page number with an *a* or *b* in addition to the number, such as 186a. These refer to entries that have been received later than one month after the quarter's end and their page has had to be inserted later into the already numbered index. There is a greater possibility for error with these entries, for example one case involves the groom being inserted in the index of one quarter whereas his bride is left all by herself in the next quarter! Those interested in delving into this subject more deeply in order to be able to more precisely locate events without having to purchase the certificates should consult Millington.

Problems Encountered

Foster has dramatically pointed out the deficiencies of the idealistic system and it can be summarized as:

- With marriages the system depended upon the unverified transcripts made by the clergy to their local superintendent registrars. There was no system of checking for accuracy, legibility or completeness. It is now recognized that there are huge discrepancies in all these areas.
- Marriage transcripts were supposed to be sent in by 15,000 clergy, many unwilling to espouse civil registration, within one month of the end of each quarter. Unfortunately no one ensured that all clergy knew when the quarters ended! Some entries were sent in months or years late, others sent in twice with two different quarter's transcripts. These late ones might be indexed in a subsequent quarter, ignored, or entered in both quarters.

- It is estimated that 50,000 marriage entries are completely missing from the local register office and GRO indexes. These can be found in local church records.
- An additional 5.6 percent of marriages were found by Foster to be in the local register offices but *not in the GRO*. This is a further 1 million marriages utterly missing from the national indexes!
- To these last two figures have to be added an unknown but large number of unfindable entries due to various errors during the transcription processes. Foster has given an estimate of 5 percent of marriage entries having an indexing error. It should be less for births and deaths that have fewer indexing steps. However, in his conclusion, Foster says that errors in transcription and indexing are far more common than omissions.
- Further problems occurred when the superintendent registrars made copies for transmission to the Registrar General in London. These include mis-transcribing from their own entries of births and deaths, or from poorly written clergy copies of marriages, as well as omitting large numbers of entries.
- When these all arrived in London they were indexed manually into one large national index. The omissions, incorrect alphabetizations, wrong spellings, non-existent district names, etc. etc. are so numerous as to constitute a national disgrace. Collins was quoted as saying that a study showed that the work of five clerks produced a total of 20,000 errors on the handwritten indexes.

- When some of the handwritten volumes were retyped the process was sloppy; no proofreading checks were done so spellings have been frequently mangled. Only the first entry for each surname had the surname typed, with ditto marks for the rest, thus if the typist forgot the surname then a whole column from Albert to Zilpa seemed to be attached to the previous surname. A keen eye can spot these, but one is never quite sure of the intended surname.
- In this retyping process arabic numbers were substituted for the old roman volume numerals—unfortunately not always accurately, thus one doesn't know whether the name or number of the district is correct. It is usually the name, but there are errors there too. There were also large numbers of page number mis-typings.
- Incredible as it may seem, the original handwritten indexes were discarded after the *unchecked*, error-riddled typewritten copies were made. There is no recourse to them now at the General Register Office. However, the LDS microfilms were made from the handwritten copies and may be consulted.
- None of the various filmings of these national indexes are perfect. Most have poorly written or typed originals from which to work, pages omitted, and huge numbers of out-of-focus and incompletely filmed pages.
- The general conclusion from Foster's book is that one should not be surprised if five to ten percent of the entries you require, and which were duly registered, are not findable on the present indexes, even by someone searching for all the spelling variations in all the possible places.

Same Page Entries

Births and deaths were registered directly with the registrar of the sub-district in which they occurred and consecutively in the appropriate book. The births and deaths books had five entries to the page from 1837 until 1 April 1969. Where illegitimate children are registered under both father's and mother's surnames this increases the number of names found per page in the indexes. Similarly, those who use an alias, (two surnames), and cases where the clerk couldn't decipher the handwriting and hedged his bets by indexing under different surnames or given names, will have more entries per page.

The sharp researcher keeps eyes open for index entries occurring in the same district, volume and page number as known or possible ancestors. Our forebears had to be economical and, like us, needed support during times of stress. We can understand why they celebrated 2 family marriages on the same day, or travelled together to the register office to register two births or deaths which had occurred within the last few days or weeks. These would tend to be entered on the same or contiguous pages in the registrar's book. The actual page numbers are from the national index, of course, but the closeness reveals that they could be close in the local registers as well. With five entries per page for births and deaths, and up to four marriages per page it's not a hard search for the registrar to check one or two pages.

Common sense tells us that adjacent entries in large registers are more likely to be significant (that is, on the same day) than those in small ones where they only had, say, three marriages per quarter. However, epidemics can take out several children in a family very quickly, as in the example in Chart 56.

Many such adjacent entries are sheer coincidence but it is sometimes worth checking with the local Superintendent Registrar for:

- ✓ births of twins or triplets
- ✓ double marriages
- ✓ deaths of relatives close in time due to epidemic, accident or mother-and-newborn

In fact I have seen cases where an alert registrar notes this to the researcher completely unasked, just because they happen to have seen it as they looked for the required entry.

Completeness of the Indexes

There are major problems with the indexes, as documented quite terrifyingly by Foster. All researchers should read his book, or failing that at least read Anthony Camp's extensive review of it in *Family Tree Magazine* (1999). Every possible kind of error has been made, contributing to the gross incompleteness of the national indexes that we now view.

The problems are of basically two kinds:

- *Under-registration*, especially of births, which was as high as 33 percent in Catholic areas of Liverpool even as late as 1865-74 (Camp 1999, Foster).

- *No quality control on the input or indexing*, for example, the unrealistic expectations that 15,000 clergy would fill in their marriage copies perfectly with no need for checking accuracy, or that their handwriting was legible, and that they would all send in their returns on time every quarter.

The present indexes are therefore far from complete and far from accurate. The researcher who is aware of this is better prepared to unearth the hidden entries and understand the other deficiencies.

Problems Reading the Indexes

The quality of the *early films* and the *old script used* frequently cause problems. If you cannot decipher the name of the Registration District but can read the volume number, then consult Charts 4-6 in the publication *Using Register Offices for English & Welsh Certificates* to find the names of all districts within a numbered area.

Chart 4 is for 1837-1851
Chart 5 is for 1852-1946
Chart 6 is for 1946-1965

If you are using GRO films where the left hand page has its right hand edge too tightly bound, and thus the page numbers are unreadable, try this idea. Look at the next page to the right where you will see a small fraction (which includes the page numbers) of the left hand page. Counting down to the correct entry will find a legible page number. This method is not necessary in GSU films because the pages were spread flat and photographed together.

The *fiche indexes* are sometimes so awful as to be unreadable. It seems that they not only used second or third carbon copies from which to film, but the operators did not always ensure that the picture was in focus. The filming was done by British government employees, not the LDS church whose standards are higher.

If you have a problem reading fiche indexes, and cannot access the originals or filmed copies, then there is a solution. The Family History Library in Salt Lake City has the indexes on film for 1837-1980. For approximately 25¢ US you can obtain a photocopy of the index page by using the Request for Photocopies Form.

How to Transcribe from the Indexes

First, plan which years you need to search, and what districts are relevant, then construct an alphabetical list of possible surname spellings and first name variations. Remember that although Nellie is a nickname for Ellen, Eleanor and Helen, some girls were registered as Nellie, and so forth. There is a list of common nicknames in the book *Researching Your English and Welsh Ancestors*. Be thorough and accurate in your searching. Get into the habit of taking *all* the possible entries so that you will never have to redo a search; I wish I had done so much sooner!

For both indexes and records, do use a printed transcription form wherever possible as it ensures that you record each column of information. Six different transcription forms for English & Welsh civil registration indexes of different time periods can be found in the book. Also useful is a printed chart that shows the whole list of years with boxes to highlight for needed range of years and to check off when you have searched each quarter.

Such a chart for 1837-2000 is included in the book and a worked example of a transcription form is shown in Chart 6.

CHART 6:
Example of Civil Registration Transcription Form

DASHWOOD Marriages in England & Wales

Year	Quarter	Surname	Given Name(s)	District	Vol	Page
1837	3Q	Dashwood	Catherine Rosa	Uttoxeter	17	199
1837	4Q	Dashwood	Lucy	Westminster	1	354
1838	1Q	Dashwood	Anna Maria	St. Martin	1	129
1838	4Q	Dashwood	Elizabeth	Blandford	8	57
1839	2Q	Dashwood	Henry	Poplar	2	295
1839	2Q	Dashwood	John de Courcy	Cheltenham	11	243
1839	2Q	Dashwood	Joseph	Yeovil	10	937
1839	3Q	Dashwood	Alfred William	Camberwell	4	26

Unless the surname you are seeking is a very common one it always pays to record other entries found in the same district during any search. Ensure that you record what years you covered and for which districts you took entries. Then you won't need to repeat searches later on—they are quite tedious enough the first time through!

EXAMINING BIRTH, MARRIAGE, DEATH & OVERSEAS INDEXES

Birth Indexes

The indexes are compiled according to the date of registration, not the date of birth. Most births were registered within the recommended 42 days and could therefore occur in the index of the same or the next one or two quarters. Late registrations will be entered in the indexes of the *quarter in which they were registered.*

CHART 7:
Contents of Civil Registration Birth Indexes

All contain *Year, Quarter, District, Volume & Page Number*

1837–1911	Surname	Given Names	
1 July 1911-date	Surname	Given Names	Mother's Maiden Name

No Birth Registration

If a child lived but for a few seconds there should be both a birth and a death registration, however this wasn't always strictly adhered to in that first period of civil registration. In the early years up to one third of births were not registered as it was not mandatory until 1875. The poor were less likely to register their children's births, and children who died shortly after birth were often missed.

When the system started there was a widespread belief that registration wasn't necessary if christening had taken place. Some registered their boys but not their girls. The clergy were against the whole idea, as they (rightly) foresaw the undermining of the church's grip on the populace. Some even issued handbills telling their congregation to answer the registrar's questions *if he sought them out*, but not to voluntarily register their babies' births! Thus we have to deal with the situation that some parents failed to register their children's births, and some still do! Suggestions for tackling this include:

- ✓ Searching later census records that will indicate where the child was born. A thorough search of local churches will most likely reveal a christening.
- ✓ Getting a birth certificate of a known sibling, which will give you the mother's maiden name. Beware of second and third wives, especially those bearing the same given name. The ideal situation would be to obtain birth certificates for an older and a younger sibling; if the mothers are identical then yours should be too.
- ✓ A little-known source is the *Vaccination Registers* kept from 1862 to 1948. They were a monthly return of births and infant deaths made by registrars to the Vaccination Officer. They are similar to birth registers and list the children, their ages, parishes and dates of birth and vaccination. Their survival rate is not good, but the extant ones are available at county record offices, providing a free source of primary evidence of birth.

Late Birth Registration

Any birth may be registered late, and would probably then have the signatures of both the registrar and the superintendent registrar. The family historian may gain further insight into the family situation by cogitating upon the reason for the late entry.

- ✓ Some parents were just not aware that they had to register children's births.
- ✓ Perhaps the parents were ill, dealing with a death in the family, or other pressing family circumstance and they just forgot. There were plenty of registrations several months, and even years, later for children born during the blitz in England.
- ✓ Later on, when the child needed the certificate to prove eligibility for school, apprenticeship, employment, pension etc. then a late registration may have been made upon affidavit of a parent or other person.
- ✓ An illegitimate birth may purposely be registered late, after the parents married, so that it would appear to be a legitimate child.
- ✓ What seems to be a late registration under the father's name, may actually be a re-registration to legitimize a child born before the parents' marriage and initially registered under the mother's maiden name.
- ✓ The Petty Sessions Minute Books may provide illumination of the family situation, particularly in the case of illegitimate children.

Thus many births were registered up to several years after the event and it's worth trawling further on in the indexes in case this has happened. There are people who have only discovered that they lack a birth certificate when they apply for their old-age pension. If a parent or an older sibling who could remember the birth, can attest to the date and place, then a birth certificate can be issued. However if there is no one who can fulfill these requirements then a late registration is not possible. In cases like these other proof, such as christening certificates and census records have been used in order to procure pensions.

Late registrations can often be recognized by unusual type of codes. For example in a 1910 birth registration, instead of the normal Volume and Page Number it may have *See S31*, or *See Sep 31*, both meaning that the birth took place in 1910 but is being registered in the September quarter of 1931. In 1931 this would have been a manual amendment, but may have been typewritten in a subsequent edition of the index. If the child was illegitimate there may be a registration under the mother's maiden name in the March 1910 index.

One can then ask for the certificate to be sent only if it is a late registration to the named father. Such a certificate would contain the phrase *by permission of the Registrar General* to indicate that late registration had been properly carried out and approved.

Christened Before Birth?

A surprising number of children have a birth date on their certificate which is *after* the birth date shown in the family bible, or after the christening date. There is a very simple explanation for this; parents had 42 days in which to register the birth at no charge. The birth could also be registered within six months, on payment of a fine. If this time period passed then creative alteration of the birth date was required to ensure free registration. They never dreamed that their descendants would go and check the records! You will find them in the indexes at the time of registration, which may be a couple of quarters after the christening or family bible date.

Double Registration

There are children who have been registered twice with the same names but in different registration districts, or by different informants (even on the same day at the same office) but the situation is rare. Some examples are quoted by Wood (1999). There are also cases where a child has been registered twice under different names as was the situation with Robert Marston Loverock otherwise John Edward Loverock, quoted by Harvey. In this case the index has two boys appearing with the same district, volume and page number, thus they appear as possible twins.

Twins & Multiple Births

Twins, triplets and so forth will usually be registered on the same day and hence appear on the same or adjacent pages in the index. It is not completely unknown for twins to be born some days or weeks apart, however, and thus be registered at different times. I even heard of one case where the first child, called William, died a few days later and his twin who was born two weeks after him was also given the name William! That would really cause a genealogist to have kittens.

Not all children with identical page references in the indexes are from the same parents. Many cousins were born in the same district and around the same time, so they got entered on the same page by the registrar. The problem is compounded when you have a common surname and the Welsh researcher, in particular, has to examine these entries very carefully. Luckily, Welsh registrars are very helpful to family historians and will answer such questions.

An index of Multiple Births is maintained by Teresa Williams, 87 Pasture Road, North Wembley, Middlesex HA0 3JW and she published an article on the subject in 1999.

Too Many Children of the Same Name

There are several constructive approaches to dealing with this common problem. None are foolproof if the later records for the individual have errors in them, however, they will usually suffice to find the right certificate.

- ✓ Find the correct birth registration district by finding him on each census. The parish and county *should* be given on each from 1851 onwards. Consult *Researching English & Welsh Census* for a discussion of the delights and pitfalls of censuses. The district that this town, village or parish was in *at the time of the birth* can be easily found from *Parishes & Registration Districts in England & Wales*.

- ✓ Be realistic about the possible date of birth. Use all possible sources of birth date information, not just one. Construct a *most likely date range* from all estimates and concentrate on this first.

- ✓ Find his father's name from his marriage certificate, censuses, probate and other sources. Then you can send and ask for a check to be made and the certificate to be sent *only* if he is the son of Henry (or whomever). You will get a full refund from the local Superintendent Registrar, (but only about half from the GRO), if the father is not the one you state. This technique works particularly well if you have several in the same Registration District in the same year.

- ✓ If you know a definite address for his birth, for example from a family bible, or from a census very close to the birth date, then the checking method can be used in a similar manner.

- ✓ A check can also be done on the father's occupation, but these changed, so do this only if you are sure of the occupation *at the time of birth of the child.*

- ✓ If you know a birth date but are unsure of the year you can also do a check. This is a common occurrence as we celebrate birthdays and tend to remember the actual day and month, but even the celebrant may not care to state their age accurately.

- ✓ If your ancestor has a common first name but has a sibling with an unusual one, then try getting his or her birth certificate first. This will give you the parents' names and then you can ask for your ancestor's birth to parents with those names.

- ✓ Finding the christening first will also give you parents' names and father's occupation. It may give you a precise address but maybe only the parish, town or village name.

- ✓ Finding a whole family's christenings which tie in with previously known names and order of children is cheaper than getting many birth certificates.

- ✓ There could easily be two or more John and Mary Jones having children in the same parish during the same period. Find the christenings and infant burials and sort them into families by father's occupation and address, e.g. if there were three William's born to: John & Mary Jones, butcher of High Street *or* John & Mary Jones, labourer of The Grove *or*

John & Mary Jones, carpenter of Church Road. From censuses, burials and other later information you can then sort out which is *your* William, by association with the family group.

✓ Utilize the death registrations for the next few years to see which infants survived. For example, say you are faced with five births for your ancestor Florence Brown in 1895 in the same district:

- Florence Anne Brown or
- Florence Eliza Brown or
- Florence Emily Brown or
- Florence Mary Brown or
- Florence Thirza Brown

The death indexes for 1895-6 in this district show deaths at age 0 for Florence Emily and Florence Thirza, and in 1897 Florence Anne died age one. You can thus narrow down your choice of ancestor to Florence Eliza and Florence Mary and send for checks of some kind on them.

No Name at Birth

There are two kinds of these in the indexes—those with no given name and those with neither given name nor surname. Some parents had not chosen a given name at the time of registration date and these births are listed as *male* or *female* at the end of their surname section, as in the example in Chart 8.

CHART 8:
1837 Index of Births Showing Unnamed Infants

Surname	Name, (if any) or Sex of Child	Sup. Registrar's District	Vol	Page
Andrews	William	Basford	XV	286
Andrews	William	Martley	XVIII	263
Andrews	William George	Wilton	VIII	345
Andrews	William Philip	Greeenwich	V	135
Andrews	Male	Bristol	XI	117
Andrews	Male	Blean	V	41
Andrews	Female	Edmonton	III	60
Andus	William	Stokesley	XXIV	338
Anfield	John	Llanelly	XXVI	329

Some mothers of illegitimate children did not name their babies if they were going to be adopted, either because doing so would increase the maternal bond, or because they felt that the new family should choose a name that they liked.

The clergy actively encouraged registration without a given name, as they felt this should only be announced at the christening. *If* the parents went back and informed the registrar of the child's name within 12 months then this would be entered in column 10 at the far right of the certificate, which is headed *Name entered after registration.* It is supposed to be re-indexed under the correct name at the time of the second registration.

Typically this is likely to be done in the local registrar's index, but *not* on the national indexes. If you find a possible *male* or *female* then the sensible thing to do

is to send money for the certificate from the local Register Office stipulating that your money is to be returned if the new name is *not* the one needed, *or* the parents are *not* those required. If you attempt such a check through the postal service at Southport, it is less likely to be successful because few such corrections reached them, and only a portion of your money will be returned if the search is incorrect.

It is also possible, but rare, to *change* the given name up to 12 months after the original registration of birth by the use of column 10. Again it is supposed to be re-indexed at the time. There is a restriction against changing a registered name if the child has already been christened with it. This applies equally to adopted children's given names. The section for those children who had no name at all at birth, and these were mainly foundlings, occurs after the surnames beginning with Z. They are listed as:

Unknown, female—Brighton
Unknown male—Doncaster

At first it may seem that these are a lost cause as far as identification during later life is concerned, but not necessarily. Foundlings, who were mostly illegitimate babies, were generally taken in by the workhouse and cared for there. Many, of course, died but if they survived then they would have to be christened at the local parish church, and would have no parents' names. Vicars seemed to have either a limited imagination or a perverse sense of humour when dreaming up names for these children.

So if your ancestor was called Sarah Parish or Thomas Foundling, or had a name relating to the place where they were found like Mary Gates (the workhouse gates), or John White Lion (near the White Lion pub) they could be a foundling and initially registered as an *unknown*. Other vicars used the name of the saint to whom their church was dedicated, for example there are many children called Clement or Clementina who originated as foundlings in St. Clement Danes parish in London. Yet others used the town name or a specific street name, and if this is an unusual surname like Manchester or Portugal then it is a good theory that the child was a foundling.

'Wrong' Name Registered

There are plenty of folks who went through life with a perfectly good name that wasn't the one under which they were registered. Every family has a few of these:

- Didn't like the name they were given.
- Used a standard nickname such as Fanny for Frances, or Bob for Robert.
- Father registered them as one name but mother used another and it stuck.
- Acquired a non-standard nickname fairly early in life and it stuck, for example my great aunt Dolly was the youngest baby and looked like a little girls' doll. Her registered and christened name was Alice Elsie.
- No one knows why great uncle Fred was called that—he was registered and christened as Albert William!

Where you can gather family memories then the order of children, combined with a chance remark about *it not being his proper name* can alert you to look for other names. If the family stayed put in one place then a search of christening registers and censuses may straighten things out. Parents' wills can be gold mines here as well, giving phrases such as *my son Augustus otherwise Bill.*

Mother's Maiden Surname

From the September quarter of 1911 the mother's maiden name is shown in the indexes. This makes finding the family a lot easier provided she has had only one marriage and the informant quotes the same surname for each one. If the mother's maiden name is the same as the child's it could arise in one of three ways:

- An illegitimate child.
- Mother and father had the same surnames before marriage.
- The parents had cohabited before marriage and she had become known by his surname. I noted elsewhere that the maiden name is defined as that which she is known by just prior to marriage.

In cases of second marriages it really depended very much on how the question was asked as to whether the *name prior to this marriage* or the *maiden surname* was recorded. Being alert to this possibility whilst compiling lists of births in a certain district can help ascertain a maiden name and a first married name.

In turn this can assist in finding many previously unfindable but lawful marriages. Before divorce became more democratically available in the 1940s second marriages were frequently common-law and these will not be registered, of course.

Illegitimate Births

Roughly five percent of the population is illegitimate. Thus the chances of having some in your ancestry are high, though not more than one in twenty, since the death rate for illegitimate children was far higher than for those born within the bonds of marriage.

From 1837 until 1874 the mother of an illegitimate child could name anyone she liked as the father upon registering the child. It is doubtful that all were truthful but the registrar had to accept her word. When the father is named on the certificate then the child's birth should be indexed under both surnames. After 1875 illegitimate children are indexed under both parents only if the father admitted paternity to the local registrar. Even then, some children may only be registered under one surname, as the indexes are horribly deficient.

A parent did not need to show their marriage certificate when registering the birth of a child. Many children were registered with their father's surname where their parents had a common-law relationship (Chart 32).

The Legitimacy Act of 1926 enabled children to take their father's name after registration if he married the mother. A second registration will have been made at this time and should be found in the indexes.

This is, of course, legalized falsification, and will lead the researcher astray when trying to find the parents' marriage. However, there is a way to identify such re-registered birth certificates as they contain the wording: *On the authority of the Registrar General*, and after 1939 (Rogers 1988) the child's original NHS (National Health Service) number is retained. A note saying *Re-registered on (date)* is placed on the original registration so that staff will not issue a certificate from it again.

Foundlings

Foundlings are indexed at the very end of the Volume after the letter Z with the surname *Unknown*. From 1977 there is an Abandoned Children's Register at the Family Records Centre where the children are indexed under the name given to the child.

There is also an index at the Family Records Centre of foundlings in the care of the Foundling Hospital in London and further details about these children's records can be found in Bevan.

Adoptions

Indexes to the registers of adoptions from 1927 to date are available at the Family Records Centre. These list the adopted name, with no reference to the original one at birth. Instead of the usual Volume and Page Number, there will be an Adopted Children Register reference number from 1927 to 1939, or an NHS (National Health Service) number after 1939. They are indexed under the year of adoption and this may be many years after birth.

It is worth checking with the County Record Office for adoption and foster care records, particularly since 1927. The London Metropolitan Archives has some 100,000 children's files.

Stillbirths

Many stillborns were registered from 1837 but this was not absolutely required until 1927, although death certificates for those surviving a few minutes or hours will often be found. It is very doubtful that all premature stillbirths were registered where no doctor or midwife attended.

The GRO at Southport holds records of stillbirths since 1927 but these are not available to the general public and the indexes are not on the open shelves. No records are held at local register offices. Details can only be revealed to the parents themselves or, when they are both dead, to the siblings.

A stillbirth entry naturally combines attributes of both birth and death entries, but the cause of death was

added only after 1859. In contrast to all other deaths, a certificate was not needed for the burial of a stillborn child in the early years of registration. This was found to encourage under-registration of live births, especially illegitimate ones, and subsequent infanticide. The law was changed in 1874, and a medical doctor had to fill in a certificate stating that either he delivered a stillborn, or that he was confident that the dead baby he saw was still born. This had to be taken to the cemetery or sexton in order to allow burial.

You should note that stillborns were not always entered in the burial registers. An index of Still births is maintained by Teresa Williams, 87 Pasture Road, North Wembley, Middlesex HA0 3JW (see Williams 1999).

In 1983 the law was finally changed to allow a stillborn child to be named at the time of birth, but not retrospectively.

First Children in a Family

The first (or first few!) children in a marriage very often came along before the actual ceremony took place. Sometimes they were registered with their father's surname but more likely with their mother's. Is that why you can't find them on the index? To discover her maiden name get the birth certificate of a younger sibling then try the indexes again for your ancestor. It is by no means unknown that a man started a second family before his first wife died, but subsequently married the second wife thereby legitimizing the children.

Marriage Indexes

Marriages are indexed under the date of the event, rather than the date of registration as happens for births and deaths. Sadly, the marriage indexes do not list the two spouse's names together until 1912. For marriage entries, if you know the names of both parties then look first under the least common surname, then cross-reference *in the same quarter* with the name of the spouse. You should get exactly the same Registration District, Volume and Page Number for each. *After all, they usually married in the same place and on the same day!*

CHART 9:
Contents of Civil Registration Marriage Indexes
All contain *Year, Quarter, District, Volume And Page Number*

1837-1911	Surname	Given Names	
1912-date	Surname	Given Names	Spouse's Surname

CHART 10:
1912 Marriage Indexes

Names of Persons Married		District	Vol	Page #
Routley, Henry	Rowe	Williton	5c	593
" John	Vaughan	Williton	5c	622
" Maud E.	Charlton	Birmingham	6d	328
" Stanley H.	Annesley	Wandsworth	1d	1137
" Walter R.	Felwell	Atherstone	6d	962
Rover, Ethel M.	Burton	W. Ham	4a	306
Row, Edith F.R.	Quarman	Pancras	1b	244

Without knowing the spouse's surname it is naïve to expect to be able to *find* the right partner by trawling through the whole index from A-Z. The marriage books from 1837 to the March quarter of 1852, (and a few others to 1856 that were using old stationary), contain up to four marriages per page. Starting in the June quarter of 1852, and consistently after 1856, the books contain two marriages per page. Thus several male and several female names match any particular reference.

The only way this trawl would work is if you:

- ✓ Were certain of the given names used at marriage
- ✓ Found all the entries for that page
- ✓ Found only one with the required given name

Many inexperienced family historians have *found* a suitable entry by stopping at the first matching page. Many of them don't follow up to get the certificate. If they did they would often find that the two parties were on the same page, but not married to each other! Similarly, many have been mystified to find two people of the same sex 'marrying' by using the same assumption. It is wise to remember that a person using two names, for example, *Rogers otherwise Taylor*, would be indexed twice. When clerks were unsure of spellings they would index under two or more variants to cover all possibilities. These factors increase the numbers of names found per page on the indexes.

All kinds of errors occur in the indexes, as pointed out by Foster. Consider the following which have occurred frequently:

- wife indexed under same married name as her husband
- father indexed instead of the spouse
- one spouse indexed but not the other
- sex changed, for example Hannah indexed as Henry
- entries on back of page were omitted from index
- first letter misread because of poor writing
- names of districts incorrectly transcribed
- volume numbers incorrectly written

A previously married woman usually used her former married name, but may have reverted to her maiden name, or even the name of another previous husband. Either party may have been recorded under a different spelling than that found in family sources. If you feel that an unmatched entry has to be the right one, then check with the Superintendent Registrar.

Widows and divorcées are usually entered under their former husband's surname, but some chose to use their maiden name. If either party has been known by a surname different from that being used at the marriage *and* the registrar is informed of this, then both surnames *should* appear in the index as well as on the certificate. The word *otherwise* or phrases such as *formerly known as* can appear on certificates *but only* if the Registrar was told about it at the time.

From 1912 the spouse's surname is listed on the index, thus you can cross reference to find the full name. Trudging through a list of Jones or Smiths can be rather wearing so use this tip. A very unscientific survey shows that there are more female given names in the

first half of the alphabet, for example, Alice, Ann, Caroline, Catherine, Eliza, Elizabeth, Ellen, Emily, Frances, Harriet, Jane, Kate, Louisa and Mary.

More male given names are on the last half, for example, William, Walter, Thomas, Stephen, Samuel, Robert, Richard, Joseph, John, and James. So, if you have to look through a common surname for a female start at A, for a male start at Z. It isn't always quicker, but it's more likely to be.

Marriage typically took place in the bride's parish, which may not be the parish of her birth or christening. This fact should be born in mind when searching the indexes, as the district name is more helpful for a woman than for a man, since a marriage was more likely to take place in their own district. The couple then moved to where the husband's work was located, which could be many counties away.

There are, of course, exceptions to the general pattern, for personal reasons or during times of disruption such as wars.

Where one of the couple lived in Scotland or Ireland then that person had to abide by the civil registration laws of notice of marriage in their own country from 1845 (Ireland non-Catholics, and 1864 Catholics) and 1855 (Scotland). This happened in reverse if the marriage took place outside England. Interestingly, Scotland did not require residency, and notice could be given by mail, so some couples who both lived outside Scotland chose to marry there.

If you are doing a marriage search and know the surnames of both parties save yourself a lot of work by choosing to search the most unusual surname first, then cross reference to the common one. There will be far fewer to cross reference. Start looking for a marriage in the same quarter in which the first child arrives, and then proceed backwards to a date when they are known, or likely, to have been unmarried.

Your notebook page can be set up as in Chart 11. The first child was born in 2Q 1853, and James was unmarried in the previous census, taken in 2Q 1851. This established the date range to search. As I searched the different spelling variations of Brickett for each quarter I noted all Ann's on my chart. Whilst in that quarter I cross referenced to James Taylor. An X was placed where no corresponding entry occurred. Even if you are working with uncommon names it is wise to cover the whole possible date range as there may be more than one possibility. It is far better to know that now, rather than proceed with the first one found and spend years researching someone else's ancestors! Just imagine how many David Jones have married Mary Evans in any district in Wales!

CHART 11:
Marriage Search for Ann BRICKETT to James TAYLOR 1853 2Q Back to 1851 2Q

Year	Q	Ann BRICKETT	District	Vol	Page	James TAYLOR
1853	2Q	—				
	1Q	—				
1852	4Q	Ann BRIGGET	Maidstone	2a	179	X
	3Q	—				
	2Q	Ann BRICKETT	St. Saviour	1d	12	X
	1Q	Ann BRICKET	Bethnal Green	1c	333	James TAYLOR
1851	4Q	—				
	3Q	—				
	2Q	—				

Prohibited Degrees

Marriage is not allowed between close blood relations (*consanguinity*) or between those closely related by marriage (*affinity*) until 1907 in England, although this law was repealed much earlier in North America. A list of the prohibited degrees follows in Chart 12.

CHART 12:
Prohibited Degrees for Marriage

A Man Was Not Allowed to Marry His	A Woman Was Not Allowed to Marry Her
Grandmother	Grandfather
Grandfather's wife	Grandmother's husband
Wife's grandmother	Husband's grandfather
Father's sister	Father's brother
Mother's sister	Mother's brother
Father's brother's wife	Father's sister's husband
Mother's brother's wife	Mother's sister's husband
Wife's father's sister	Husband's father's brother
Wife's mother's sister	Husband's mother's brother
Mother	Father
Step-mother	Step-father
Wife's mother	Husband's father
Daughter	Son
Wife's daughter	Husband's son
Son's wife	Daughter's husband
Sister	Brother
Wife's sister	Husband's brother
Brother's wife	Sister's husband
Son's daughter	Son's son
Daughter's daughter	Daughter's son
Son's son's wife	Son's daughter's husband
Daughter's son's wife	Daughter's daughter's husband
Wife's son's daughter	Husband's son's son
Wife's daughter's daughter	Husband's daughter's son
Brother's daughter	Brother's son
Sister's daughter	Sister's son
Brother's son's wife	Brother's daughter's husband
Sister's son's wife	Sister's daughter's husband
Wife's brother's daughter	Husband's brother's son
Wife's sister's daughter	Husband's sister's son
Marriage between a Jew and a Gentile only possible after 1837	

A Man Was Not Allowed to Marry His	A Woman Was Not Allowed to Marry Her
Marriage to an adoptive parent has been added to this list during the 20th century. However one can marry one's adoptive sibling.	

To our genetically-informed populace today it comes as a mild shock that several of these *were not* permitted whilst marriage between *first cousins* was! This was legalized in the 1540s, and accounted for about two or three percent of marriages.

Marriage contracted within the prohibited degrees unknowingly before 1835 was voidable. After this date all prohibited marriages were automatically void. Modifications have been made to the list within the last century as shown in Chart 13.

CHART 13:
Modern Modifications to the List of Prohibited Degrees

Date	Marriage Now Permitted
1907	Deceased wife's sister Deceased husband's brother (Strict clergymen would not perform such marriages)
1921	Deceased brother's widow Deceased sister's widower
1931	Nephew or niece by marriage
1949?	Aunt or uncle by marriage
1986?	Spouse's parent

Despite the law many couples did marry within these prohibited degrees, and unless challenged, merrily went about their way. The most common problem faced by genealogists, is that of marriage to a deceased wife's sister. We have to think about the practicalities of a man widowed with a number of small children to raise. Who is the most logical person to step in and hold the fort immediately after the wife's death, or even while the wife is dying? Who would be accepted most willingly by the children? An unmarried, or widowed, sister of his late wife is a very smart solution. But marriage would not have been sanctioned by the local church, thus cohabitation under the husband's surname, a *housekeeper* arrangement, or marriage in a distant parish where neither was known were acceptable remedies. Consider these options when faced with a hard-to-find second marriage.

Remarriage to the Same Spouse

Occasionally a couple will remarry each other; the reasons vary:

- ✓ In my experience it is quite often that an irregularity has been discovered in the original marriage record. Examples are a widower having been described as a bachelor, a totally incorrect name having been written down, or not enough (or too many) days having elapsed between banns or licence and the ceremony. In order to make the marriage completely legal, and to protect the legitimacy of children, a second ceremony has been carried out. On the second certificate you may find the phrase *having been previously married to each other* (sometimes with the date and perhaps the place), or a brief description of the error made in the former marriage entry. The first marriage was void thus in the second the marital conditions will be described as if they had never married.

- ✓ In other cases you occasionally find that a couple has married twice on the same day. This may be in two different places so that all family members can attend, or perhaps in two different churches to appease both sides of the family. In both marriages the marital condition of the parties would be that in existence the previous day.

- ✓ Another occurrence is when the first marriage is in a Register Office, and then some time later they decide to have a church wedding. We should remember that Register Office marriages were frowned upon by most parts of society until well after WWI and this could account for the decision.

- ✓ If a man in the services married without his commanding officer's permission then he may have run into problems later on. Examples include: no marriage allowance, no extra pay allowances, and that if the wife wanted to travel abroad with him she could only be *put on the strength* of a regiment, (and thus have her expenses paid), if they had been married with the commanding officer's permission. So, if your problem second marriage is for an army man, this could be the answer. A good example is quoted by Downham et al.

- ✓ Nowadays we also see a few couples who remarry after divorcing.

- ✓ An interesting situation occurs when a couple marries twice and then decides to divorce and remarry other partners. They need to dissolve *both* marriages otherwise they can be accused of bigamy with the next partner. Wood (1998) quotes the case of the 6th Marquis and Marchioness of Bath to whom this actually happened.

Bigamy

There seem to have been several definitions for bigamy over the course of English history. In the dictionaries today we see:

- *having two wives or husbands at once*
- *crime of making a second marriage while the first is still valid*
- *crime of going through a form of marriage while previous marriage is still in existence*

Whilst very early on it also included: *Marriage of, or with, a widow, or widower!*

Divorce Records

The 1857 Divorce Act amended the hitherto confused laws of marriage and separation. Further Acts of Parliament regarding divorce came in 1873, 1878, 1925, 1960 and 1970. For details of the acts and information on what records the Public Record Office has, consult the PRO leaflet on Divorce #127, which can be downloaded at www.pro.gov.uk

Until the 1920s divorce was very rare, and then not at all common until the 1940s. Records of those that did take place are in two places.

The Public Record Office at Kew has divorce files from 1858 to 1940 in J77 and indexes from 1858 to 1958 in J78. Both are open to the public, except some that are closed for 75 years. Files may contain petitions for divorce and judicial separation, declarations of legitimacy, a copy of the petition and grounds for divorce. This material contains much other family data, including the date and place of the original marriage and is thus another method of finding that record itself.

From 1941 onwards divorces are in the Principal Registry of the Family Division at Somerset House, Strand, London WC2R 1LP. Searches are done for a fee, although there are indexes for the earliest divorces from 1941 to 1958 in J78 in the Public Record Office at Kew. Common-law marriages were much more frequent than we usually recognize, partly because so many separated people were unable to divorce and forbidden to remarry, unless their previous marriage was annulled or they divorced.

The Family History Library has a useful fiche 6344779 (9) *Index to Divorces as listed in Palmer's Index to the Times 1788-1910.* Unfortunately it can only be consulted in Salt Lake City, there being *no circulation to Family History Centers*. The compiler, Mrs. A. Weare, 5 Berwick Close, Birkenhead, Merseyside L43 9KA will do a search for £1. Or it may be worth asking a Utah friend to search for you, or use the Request for Photocopies method.

Death Indexes

A death is registered in the district in which it occurred not where the deceased usually lived. Deaths should normally be registered within five days unless the coroner is involved, when it could be weeks or even months later. The event will, of course, be indexed in the quarter in which it was registered, not when the death took place.

Since 1837 a disposal certificate from the registrar or coroner has to be produced before a normal burial or cremation can take place. This means that there has been a very small occurrence of under-registration, less than 2 percent, and these were mostly infants. Furthermore the disposal certificate has to be returned to the registrar within 14 days showing how and where the corpse was laid to rest, except for stillborns who are exempt.

There has to be a body, or part of a body, in order that a death registration can be made. Those whose bodies are unrecovered from mining disasters or shipwrecks would thus not be entered in the indexes because no death certificate was made out. Thus *missing presumed dead*, even after the person is pronounced legally dead after 7 years disappearance, does not result in a death certificate being available.

I am unclear as to whether this policy was adhered to strictly in the case of deaths of soldiers on active service.

CHART 14:
Contents of Civil Registration Death Indexes

All contain *Year, Quarter, District, Volume And Page Number*

1827-1865	Surname	Given Names	
1866-March 1969	Surname	Given Names	Age
April 1969-date	Surname	Given Names	Birth Date

Ages are not given in the early indexes, but they are on the certificates, of course. This is a major stumbling block in finding the correct entry but there are some ways round this:

- Make full use of local burial indexes and M.I.s (Monumental Inscription) transcripts compiled by Family History Societies.

- Find the burial or cemetery register so you know the age and residence as well as the quarter in which a registration took place.

- Find the probate indexes from 1858, which gives the date and place of death.

- Eliminate other contenders by the above methods.

- Have a check made, preferably in the local register office, citing the date and place of death.

Starting in 1866, the age *as known or guessed at by the informant* is shown on the national index but curiously not on the local one. Use this information with great caution. Infants under one year are marked as '0' in the indexes. Many of these are registered simply as *male* or *female* after the Zerubabble's and Zilpha's for that surname, having died too soon after birth to have been given a name. Starting in April 1969 the exact date of birth is shown in the death index, but again, is only as good as the informant's knowledge or imagination.

Unidentified bodies are registered after the Z surnames in each quarter and these were naturally much more prevalent before we all carried umpteen pieces of identification. In 1840 there were over 500 *unknowns* compared to about 50 per year today. Who were these *unknowns?*

- ✓ Large numbers were newborn infants; infanticide was known to be common. Deaths of poor infants whose parents could not afford a burial would also account for some.

- ✓ Those found dead, mostly male, but a few were so decayed that the sex was impossible to distinguish.

Very few were subsequently identified, although consultation of local burial registers and newspaper reports may turn up a few with names added later. For unknown deaths a coroner's report would have been made, and this may provide further clues.

If you have lost someone and know the probable year and district of death, then judicial use of the *unknown* section together with local records may solve your dilemma. For further discussion of the *unknown* sections of both birth and death indexes see Habgood-Everett.

General Problem Solving

In the comments that follow I am assuming that you are working backwards from the known to the unknown. If you are proceeding correctly in this manner, and coordinating your civil registration searches with census work, then you should have all of the necessary facts for finding the correct entries.

Did You Stop at the First One?

Prior to conducting an index search you should carefully deduce the appropriate range of years to be searched. Then decide which end (or the middle) is the most likely, and start there. It is, however, a mistake to stop at the first likely-looking candidate. Even with rare names there could be more than one, and you will save time, money and heartache if you do a thorough job from the beginning. Keep good notes on what years and quarters you have searched and transcribe *all the information*. See the section on How to Transcribe an Index for more information.

Are You Looking in the Right Place?

Many registrations of birth, marriage and death will not be found on the national index because, unbeknownst to you, perhaps the event occurred whilst the man was doing his bit defending the country, or out of the country in the course of his trade or business. There cannot be very many families in Britain who did not have one of their men serve time in the army or navy. The service may have been short and you may not yet be aware of it. The army, navy, service chaplains, and World War Overseas Indexes should also be searched. Consular and High Commission records and several others will contain the records of, for example, the thousands of families who were sent abroad to help build railways in distant parts of the Empire.

If you find an Overseas Register entry and obtain the certificate you are very fortunate because it can lead you to other documentary sources of service and careers. Consider the following example:

The Salutary Tale of Gladys Dashwood

I needed to find the parents of Gladys Maudsley née Dashwood of Southampton, Hampshire who was born in the 1890s. Her marriage is shown in the index in 1921 in Southampton as Gladys E.E. Dashwood. In looking for her birth I found three possibilities:

Gladys Ivy	1898 West Ham (east London)
Gladys Irene	1901 Wandsworth (south London)
Gladys Eveline T	1899 Portsea (Hampshire)

As they are the only ones in the index I could rationalize that Gladys E.E. is a mistake for Gladys E.T. and go ahead and order the certificate for this birth, the only one in the same county. The true story, however, is that there are two ladies named Gladys involved here:

Gladys Eveline Tyson Dashwood	
Born	13 Mar 1899 Southampton
Parents	Ernest Everard Dashwood
	Louisa Fanny née Smith

There is no marriage or death record in the indexes. Did she emigrate or have a common-law marriage?

Gladys Eileen Eleanor Dashwood	
Born	7 Feb 1897 South Africa
Parents	Thomas Guy Henry Dashwood
	Caroline Agnes née Chandler
Married	28 Feb 1921 Southampton
	William Maudsley

A surprising number of people seem to *vanish* from the national indexes. Many of them emigrated, and while a small proportion returned, the latter do account for some of the odd gaps when you can't find them on the census, or can't locate the births of some of their children. Perhaps they were in North America for a few years? You can often pick this up by examining the birthplaces given on later censuses for these children. Try the USA decennial censuses in the '0' years, and also on the '5s' in many States, available to 1920 and with many indexes.

Canadian censuses were done on the '1s' as in Britain, and are available up to 1901 at present. What are some of the factors involved in the location of events which cause people to be away from the expected registration district?

- ✓ Marriages traditionally took place in the bride's parish, which may have been the same as the groom's or may have been hundreds of miles away.

- ✓ During times of national dislocation, such as wars, many births, marriages and deaths occurred in places you would not expect because of evacuation or military service.

- ✓ Other reasons that people died in the 'wrong place' include sudden deaths away from home, a widow/er went to live with a married child and died there, or they died in a hospital that was in a different registration district than their usual abode.

Overseas Indexes

In addition to the regular birth, marriage and death registrations kept by the Registrar General there is a series of *Overseas Indexes*, some dating back to the 18th century. They have previously been referred to as the *Supplementary* or *Miscellaneous Indexes* and are also referred to as the *Statutory Returns*. They are of particular interest to researchers looking for those who served in the forces or lived abroad.

Simplified lists of these indexes are included in Charts: 15, 17 and 19. You can't always find all of these Volumes on the shelves at the Family Records Centre at any one time. Useful further reading can be found in Bevan, Camp (2000-1, 2000-3, 2000-4), and Yeo.

The indexes are now becoming available on fiche, for a hefty price from the GRO if you want your own copy. They are also becoming available from the LDS church at approximately 30¢ Canadian per fiche for communal collection and use at any Family History Center. They can be found in the FHLC under GREAT BRITAIN – CIVIL REGISTRATION – INDEXES and the fiche numbers for those available so far are indicated in Charts 15, 17 and 19.

Note: Marine Births and Deaths refer to events At Sea not to the (Naval) Marines, and only apply to ships registered in Britain. The three sets each for Births, Marriages and Deaths for the Ionian Islands refer to the Military, Civil and Chaplains Returns respectively.

Overseas Birth Indexes

CHART 15:
The Overseas Birth Indexes

Type	Dates	GSU Fiche #
[Army] Chaplains' Returns	1796-1880	6137330 (3)
Air Births	1947-1965	6137325 (1) Only 3, names on FHLC
Army [Navy, Air Force] Returns	1881-1965	6137331-47 (63)
Births Abroad	1966-1994	6137373-401 (182)
Births at Sea/Marine Births + Informal certificates	1837-1965 1839-1867	6137268-322 (56) 6137267 (1)
Civil Aviation Births	1947-1965	
Consular [Foreign] Births	1849-1965	6137348-70 (104)
Ionian Islands	1818-1864	6137404 (3) 6137407 (1) and 6137410 (2)
Miscellaneous Foreign Births	1956-1965	
Protectorates in Africa & Asia (1895-1940 at PRO)	1941-1965	
Regimental Births Supplement	1761-1924 1761-1924	6137402 (95) 6137403 (8)
Service Departments Registers [Army, Navy, Air Force]	1956-1965	
UK High Commission [Commonwealth] Births	1940-1965	6137371-2 (17)

An example of a listing of overseas births is in Chart 16.

CHART 16:
Regimental Births 1761-1924

Year	Name	Place	Regiment	Vol	Page
1837	DARTNELL Caroline E.	Bellary [India]	41st	1333	15
1838	DARTNELL John G.	Quebec [Canada]	–	148	139
1886	DARTNALL Charles E.	Exeter [England]	R.A. [Royal Artillery]	381	59
1896	DARTNALL George H.	Sialkot [India]	R.A [Royal Artillery]	411	2

Overseas Marriage Indexes

CHART 17:
The Overseas Marriage Indexes

Type	Dates	GSU Fiche #
[Army] Chaplains' Returns	1796-1880	6137413 (2)
Army [Navy, Air Force] Returns	1881-1955	6137414-28 (39)
Army Marriages within British Lines	1914-1925	6137487 (1)
Articles 6 & 128 Marriages	1916-1965	6137455-7 (3) or 6137488-90 (3)
Consular [Foreign] Marriages	1849-1965	6137431-53 (55)
Ionian Islands	1818-1864	6137406 (1) 6137409 (1) and 6137412 (1)
Marriages Abroad	1966-1994	6137458-86 (52)

Type	Dates	GSU Fiche #
Miscellaneous Foreign Marriages	1956-1965	
Regimental Marriages Indexes are at ONS but not for personal searching *	1761-1924	
Service Departments Registers [Army, Navy, Air Force]	1956-1965	6137429-30 (10)
UK High Commission [Commonwealth] Marriages	1940-1981 So far only 1950-65	6137454 (2)

*Apply to Overseas Section at Southport address.

An example of a listing of overseas marriages is in Chart 18.

CHART 18:
Army Marriages 1881-1955

Year	Name	Place	Page #
1883	Charles DARTNELL	Bangalore [India]	323
1889	Georgina Jane DARTNELL	Pietermaritzburg [South Africa]	225
1910	Henry S. DURTNALL	Jersey [Channel Islands]	5

Overseas Death Indexes

CHART 19: The Overseas Death Indexes

Type	Dates	GSU FICHE #
[Army] Chaplains Returns	1796-1880	6137109 (1)
Air Deaths	1947-1969	6137323 (1)
Army [Navy, Air Force] Returns	1881-1956	6137110-26 (21)
Army War Deaths - Officers	1914-1921	6137181 (12)
Army War Deaths - Officers	1939-1948	6137184 (3)
Army War Deaths - Other Ranks	1914-1921	6137180 (110)
Army War Deaths - Other Ranks	1939-1948	6137183 (29)
Civil Aviation Deaths	1947-1965	
Consular [Foreign] Deaths	1849-1965	6137127-79 (144)
Deaths Abroad	1966-date	
Deaths at Sea/Marine Deaths	1837-1965 (not 1880)	6137189-266 (160)
Indian Services War Deaths	1914-1921	
Indian Services War Deaths	1939-1948	6137188 (2)
Ionian Islands	1818-1864	6137405 (1) 6137408 (1) and 6137411 (1)
Miscellaneous Foreign Deaths	1956-1965	
Missing Persons (Aircraft—presumed dead)	1947-1965	6137324 (1)
Natal & South Africa Forces War Deaths [Boer War]	1899-1902	6137329 (7)
Naval War Deaths	1914-1921	6137182 (12)
Naval War Deaths—Officers	1939-1948	6137186 (7)
Naval War Deaths—Ratings	1939-1948	6137185 (14)
RAF War Deaths—All Ranks	1939-1948	6137187 (10)
UK High Commission [Commonwealth] Deaths	1940-1981 so far only 1948-1965	6137326-8 (3)

An example of a list of overseas deaths is in Chart 20..

CHART 20:
War Deaths Other Ranks 1914-1921

Name	Rank*	#	Unit*	Year	Vol	Page #
DARTNALL Henry T.	A/Sgt	38630	RAMC	1918	H.6	184
DARTNELL Charles S.	L/Cpl	31331	N.Hants	1918	I.64	297
DARTNELL Frederick	Pte	S/228	RWSR	1916	I.67	4

*Rank A/Sgt = Acting Sergeant L/Cpl = Lance Corporal Pte = Private
Unit RAMC = Royal Army Medical Corps
N. Hants = North Hampshire Regiment
RWSR = Royal West Surrey Regiment

Certificates of deaths of British servicemen in hospital, 1914-1920 issued by French and Belgian authorities are located at the Public Record Office at Kew (See *Other Collections of Overseas Events*).

The *List of Regiments, Corps & Departments from which records of marriages, births and baptisms and deaths have been extracted* can be found on GSU microfiche 6137491 (2).

For Consular Returns, covering births, marriages and deaths of Britons in foreign countries, the places given in the indexes are those where the event was registered, not where it happened (which will be on the certificate.)

Most British families had at least one member who served somewhere in the Empire in the armed forces, on business, building communications systems, as a missionary, or medical personnel and so forth. You may not know whether the parents of your ancestor were abroad when he was born, or that he found a wife amongst the English community abroad, or even died in foreign parts. Thus a check of the Overseas Indexes for civil registration is useful in problem cases.

One of the best kept secrets, for I never seen it published anywhere, is the fact that many of the army returns are for events which took place *in Britain* for service personnel. For example in a survey I once did for a client of all births from 1761 to 1924 for one surname, I found that half of them were actually born in England and Scotland, not abroad, but were not found on the regular indexes (Chart 21).

CHART 21: Army Births 1761-1924 for Norrie

This was a small sample, only 15 births being registered in the name of NORRIE during this period. However it gives food for thought as half of the registrations took place in Britain.

Country of Birth	Registrations	
	Number	Percent
England	5	33%
Scotland	2	13%
Abroad	7	47%
Not listed	1	7%

There is a tradition of a birth or death at sea amongst many families, especially those of immigrants to former British colonies. The statutory returns contain a number of useful indexes to these events, such as that shown in Chart 22.

CHART 22:
Marine Deaths 1837-1965

Year	Name	Age	Ship	Page #
1880	DARTNELL B. Hutchinson	36	Athos	112
1923	William A.	21	Commonwealth	80
1941	Bruce	21	Orbita	134

Also to be mentioned is the index to several thousand *Deaths of Emigrants at Sea 1847-1869*, the vast majority of which are *not* included in the Statutory or Non-Statutory indexes above. A search will be made for approximately £1 per surname + postage by the compiler, Mrs Stella Stagg, 16 Woodbridge Road, Barking, Essex IG11 9ER.

Camp (2000-4) has a very useful article on all kinds of records for events at sea in which he also discusses the two myths of baptisms at sea having to be entered in St. Dunstan, Stepney, and that sailors were all settled for Poor Law purposes in that parish.

Obtaining an Overseas Certificate

Certificates for persons in the Overseas Indexes have to be ordered at the Family Records Centre or from the postal department.

Other Collections of Overseas Events

The GRO Indexes do not cover all of the material available for civil registration of Britons abroad. They are a good place to start, but there is much more now available elsewhere; in fact rather a rather bewildering number of sources for births, christenings, marriages, deaths and burials of the British overseas. Many of these *Non-Statutory Returns* can be found in the Public Record Office (Bevan has 13 pages of lists from Algeria to Zanzibar, and admits that there are more), or at the Guildhall Library in London (See Bevan, and Yeo).

Further sources are the: local records of the country concerned, and the India Office Library which holds its own unique collection for pre-independence India, Burma and Aden. Indexes and some registers are now appearing on film and fiche available to those searching from abroad. In some cases duplicate or similar registers are available at the Public Record Office, or Guildhall on film, for material only available by certificate purchase through the General Register Office. Those wishing more details about any of these indexes and their registers are recommended to start with Bevan, which cross-references to Yeo. Camp (2000-1) has classified them into six basic groups with indexes:

- registers from specific places 1627-1958
- foreign deaths 1831-1920
- foreign marriages 1826-1920
- foreign births 1831-1920
- foreign births, marriages and deaths mixed 1921-64
- events in Protectorates 1895-1950

Those who have exhausted the statutory indexes should read his article as well. All these sources only refer to material held in Britain. Family History Center patrons anywhere in the world are advised to *also* consult the FHLC (Family History Library Catalogue) which is available at any FHC, for sale at $5 US, and free on the Internet, to see which items can be accessed in microform.

Check under GREAT BRITAIN–CIVIL REGISTRATION for the microform numbers. This listing repeats some of the statutory list but is mostly the non-statutory material. As an example, the collection of Miscellaneous Births, Marriages and Deaths 1790-1925 in the Series RG43 is contained on five films: 1,818,041-1,818,045.

A further series of 4 films (1,419,469-1,419,471) contains Births at Sea 1854-1887, Marriages at Sea 1854-1907, and Deaths at Sea 1854-1890. The films each contain some of each category by date, and there are indexes to ships, passengers and some of the volumes. Check the FHLC listing before ordering a film.

Can't Find on Index?

Unregistered Events

It has been estimated that up to one third of births and somewhat fewer deaths were not registered before 1875 when it became mandatory. There is more possibility for non-registration of births than with marriages (where the clergy had a duplicate registration book), or deaths (because burials were only permitted on production of a death certificate.) For the first 38 years, births were the responsibility of the Registrar of the District to collect. Since he was paid a fee by the Registrar General for each registration, and also pocketed the money made from issuing registration certificates, one would have thought he would have taken his job more seriously. Apparently far too many did not—but on the other hand, three registrars (and perhaps more) took it *too* seriously and invented extra registrations. After 1874 the onus was transferred to the parents and most of them complied with the law. For unregistered events prior to 1875, when the civil registrations were less complete, you will need to check parish and nonconformist registers for christenings, marriages and burials.

Beware of family stories that feature a missing husband who *died at sea*. It was a common ploy for unwed mothers to explain the absence of a husband in this way when they moved into a new parish or immigrated. Make sure that you have independent evidence of his existence, and try to find him on the various overseas indexes if the event falls within their time range.

Evasion of registration continued in a minor way and inconvenienced those applying for Old Age Pensions when they were introduced in 1909. There is a known case of a man whose birth was not registered because his mother thought that she didn't need to as she had already registered one child by that name ten years earlier. The first boy died and the second one found he didn't have a birth certificate when he came to apply for his pension. His older sister told him the story, so he promptly got a copy of his older brother's birth certificate and enjoyed a long and happy retirement!

A similar case involved a mother failing to register the birth of a second boy a year after the first one of the same name died. When the man reached what he thought was his 65th birthday the only birth certificate to be found was one that made him a year older than he thought. He was delighted when the authorities awarded him a year's back-dated pension!

The government has tried to close loopholes, such as in 1940, when proof of birth registration was required for issuance of a ration book in order to purchase food, clothing and other essentials during the war. Other fascinating scenarios regarding unregistered events are detailed by Wood (2001).

Registered But Not on National Index

Some properly registered births, marriages and deaths are *not* on the national index because the copy of that entry did not reach London in time to be included in the index. Certificates for these entries *are* available from the District Superintendent Registrar, a source worth trying if you are unable to find an entry but know the area.

Several studies have noted the under-registration of events in the first 40 years or so of civil registration in England & Wales, especially for births. Studies have also shown that up to 30 percent of births, marriages and deaths are not on the national indexes. Some of these *are* available from the local Superintendent Registrars *if you know the area*, of course, an example being the death of my ancestor Timothy Topping. A Trinity House Petition for support for the widow of this mariner stated that Timothy Topping of Erith, Kent had died in December 1841. The death entry does not appear in the index under any spelling variant so I applied to the appropriate local office who were able to supply the certificate.

Different Spelling

The most common reason for not finding a required entry is that you are not looking for the spelling under which it happened to be registered that day! Prior to the Education Act of 1880, affecting children born from 1875 onwards, there is no guarantee that your ancestor could read or write. How, then, could he advise the registrar as to how his name was spelled?

For the researcher, the solution is to make an alphabetical list of all the possible spellings, including phonetic ones and mis-spellings. You may want to rephrase it and try adding a beginning H, or when a name starts with a letter H, try dropping it. If it starts with a vowel (including Y) then change it. Try adding an H to all the variants as well. Consider poor handwriting and how it may have been interpreted, for example many a *Mill* may have been indexed as a *Will* or *Hill*. Some names may have additional letters added or removed at the beginning, which sends you to a completely different place in the index. For example, James Jackson was born in 1841 to Robert Jackson & Jane formerly *Greaves*. The marriage certificate lists her as Jane *Reeves*. You may end up with a very long list of variations to try. Then carefully rethink your time period and proceed to check the indexes again.

Not in the Expected Place

Perhaps you are looking in the wrong place. It may be the wrong district, or even the wrong country. Separate systems operated in Ireland (from 1845) and Scotland (from 1855), Isle of Man and Channel Islands. If a marriage is not found in the expected place, find the Anglican banns book, (or equivalent Notices of Marriage in other denominations), for the likely churches attended by both parties in their districts of residence. If the marriage was by banns or notice, then the parishes of residence of both parties will be shown; there may also be a notation of the date and place of the marriage.

The Superintendent Registrar's own *Authority for* (or *Notice of) Marriage* certificate is the equivalent for civil marriages and may be found at the Register Office, the General Register Office, or deposited at the County Record Office or Archives.

Town directories can be consulted for lists of churches and other places authorized to perform marriages.

For those who married by licence, the parish of residences of both parties, plus the church(es) or building(s) at which the marriage could have taken place will be found on the licence. Consult the appropriate County Record Office or Archives in order to find these. The equivalent for a civil marriage is a *Superintendent Registrar's Licence*, and these are supposed to be returned to the Registrar General.

For Roman Catholic Marriages the date of the marriage is sometimes listed in the margin of a subsequent baptismal entry. Many ancestors have the annoying habit of dying in the *wrong place*! Don't assume that the death will be registered in the district they were living in at the last census, or at the birth of the last child, because:

- he may have moved permanently or temporarily for his work
- she may be visiting away from home
- he may have entered hospital in a different district for a fatal illness
- she may be widowed and living with a married daughter or son far away from her own home

The wise family historian casts a very wide net when looking for a death. It may be easier to find the burial or probate index first for clues to the place of death, before searching through a lot of death indexes.

Not in the Expected Year, or Range of Years

There were plenty of people who just didn't know how old they were, or deliberately adjusted their ages for a variety of purposes. There were also plenty of informants who knew even less, and thus made a guess at a likely age on a death certificate or a census. The researcher has to work with the resultant mess!

When searching for a birth, don't rely on one guess for the year of birth. Go back and obtain more estimates of the person's birth year from other sources, then refocus your index search. Be flexible about the date range you search for a marriage. In the 19th century at least 10 percent of marriages took place after the birth of the first child, according to the Office for National Statistics. The research of Wrigley and Schofield (quoted by Rogers 1998) indicated that in the first half of the 19th century almost one third of brides were pregnant.

It is not at all uncommon for the day, month and place of marriage to be passed down in the family accurately but the year to be deliberately *adjusted*. If you can't find an index entry in the year given to you, or before the births of the first child(ren), try looking in the subsequent (few) year(s).

A beautiful example of a slightly different scenario was played out in my presence at a Family History Center where a patron was searching for an ancestor's marriage on the indexes. He had the names of both parties and had been told the date and place as, we shall say, *27th June 1860 at St. Patrick's Church, somewhere in London.*

After an unsuccessful trawl through several years of indexes either side of this date, I suggested that he try the IGI just in case it may have arrived on this index. There it was alright—at St. Patrick's Church in a London district, and on 27th June—1887! This was 27 years after the children started arriving. We then worked on the theory that one of the spouses had a still-living, former partner who died in early 1887 and thus freed the widow/er to remarry. This was an extremely common scenario before divorce became economically possible and even commonplace after WWII.

Deaths are often the hardest to find, particularly when the researcher hasn't found any record since the birth of the last known child and may therefore be faced with a long index search. Make sure that you follow through on *all* censuses, and in other sources such as directories, marriages of children, obituary and monumental inscription indexes, parish burials, and death or remarriage of the spouse.

Care must be taken in using annual publications such as trade directories and electoral registers. If a name ceases being there it could mean that the person has died, but it could also mean that the person has retired, moved or didn't pay to have his information included that year. Sometimes such lists are out of date, and include those who have died a few years previously, or a business that has changed hands but retained the name of the former owner. Use them as rough guides only.

It is often quicker and cheaper to first find the approximate death date by checking the probate indexes, with their copious information, or the burial registers for local churches and cemeteries. Then go to the death indexes to find the most likely certificate. Very occasionally in the early years, a death will have been registered twice, but this became impossible after medical certificates were required from 1874.

Transcription Errors on the Indexes

It should be noted that the national indexes were made from the **copies** of certificates sent to London by the Superintendent Registrars. Copying errors by the local men, and by the clerks who made the indexes are not unknown! For example, Grace Thom born 1914 is in the index as Grace Thorn. Also the alphabetization is not perfect, sometimes this is noted on the index page, sometimes not. In some original, as well as re-typed volumes, you find the odd Ann or Arthur following William and Winifred. Here the writer or typist has omitted to put in the surname, so it looks like it belongs to the previous surname group.

Different Editions of the Indexes

Some have second names spelled out, others just initials for second given names. Films were made of the editions current at the time of filming. Later editions and later filmings or fichings, include some corrections; often entered by hand at the bottom of the page, with an indication of the correct entry point.

These corrections may arise from delayed registrations or from information corrected by the public over the years. The latest edition is on view at the Family Records Centre in London, so if all else fails you could have a check made there, perhaps by SKS (some kind soul) on an Internet lookup service.

Know the Area But No Access to Indexes?

If you do not have access to the Birth or Death indexes but are certain of the area, apply to the District Superintendent Registrar who will conduct a 3-year search only, but often this can be sufficient if you know the approximate date.

This kind of request is unlikely to be as successful for marriages since, unbelievably, many registrars have never made an overall index to their marriages! The smarter ones have now found the necessary man-hours to do this, and hence reap the monetary benefits.

Just Not There!

Occasionally records are lost or destroyed, but this should be your last excuse! If you are trying to find a particular link and nothing seems to click, it usually means that no such link exists. A wider search may eventually produce the true ancestry. Possibilities include:

- Not knowing that the usual first name was not the name under which they were registered at birth. Sometimes this is just a simple case of the child using their middle name and the family not remembering that they had a first one. Another search of the indexes looking for children born in the right district with that second name is often successful.

- In other cases completely different names have been substituted. In these cases, if an intensive examination of family sources does not reveal the original name, then one should try parish and nonconformist registers of christenings, and their parents' wills to find the childrens' names. There are other unusual and specific types of first name changes, such as someone who marries into the Jewish faith and takes a Hebraic name from then on.

- The child may be one of the *male* or *female* entries which occur after the Zena's and Zillah's for that surname. Go back to the indexes and check if there is such an entry in the right time period and district. Then send for the certificate specifying that you

only want it *IF the parents are John & Susannah* (or whatever). You will get a full refund from a local Register Office if the entry is incorrect, but the national service in London, or by post at Southport, only gives a partial refund. You may have to go sideways and first get a birth certificate for an identifiable sibling, or find the child with his parents on a census, in order to establish the parents' names.

- Not knowing that the person was adopted, hence you are looking for the wrong name. By finding the name in the adoption index you may then be able to pursue this route.

- Not knowing that the surname has been anglicized from a foreign immigrant's name. There were many families with East European and German names who had been in England for generations but who felt enough social pressure, for example before and during the two World Wars, to officially or unofficially change their names to more English-sounding ones. This applied to other foreign names as well, such as Dutch and Polish, as the common Englishman couldn't tell the difference. With the successive waves of immigrants that have populated Britain over the centuries everyone has roots elsewhere.

- Possibly they never married at all. Common-law arrangements were extremely popular particularly amongst the poor. Just a simple promise to each other, perhaps accompanied by a party, if not by the

alleged *jump over the broomstick* was all that was required. Henry Mayhew estimated that in the mid-19th century, marriage was the norm only for Roman Catholics and Jews amongst *costers* (street salesmen, especially of fruit and vegetables, in the East End of London). They had a special name in Wales—*Little Marriages*.

- Perhaps you missed the entry owing to unfamiliarity with the writing, tiredness, skipping a quarter? It doesn't just happen to *other people!*

INFORMATION ON THE CERTIFICATES & ITS USE

Source of Certificate

There have been many variations of certificate styles. Birth and death certificates come in a variety of sizes both horizontal (landscape) and more modern vertical (portrait) ones. Marriage certificates only come in a horizontal style, but there have been different sizes. I have chosen to present transcribed examples for clarity in teaching. Of course, for one's own research a photocopy of the original entry is the preferred form.

Certificates Found at Home

A useful exercise for the family historian who unearths certificates purchased previously, is to figure out why was the certificate needed. Was a birth certificate needed to prove that the child was old enough to take up an apprenticeship, (See Bertie Gardner, Chart 25) or go out to work? After all, prevention of child labour in the factories was one of the prime reasons that certificates were introduced. Was this the copy of the *marriage lines*, as they were colloquially known, brought home from the ceremony? You can deduce this if the issue date is the same as the date of marriage. Was a death certificate needed to arrange a burial? Did a woman need to prove she had been legally married in order to secure an inheritance or annuity?

The reasons are many, and can frequently be deduced from the heading on the certificate found at home. The list of Acts of Parliament providing cheaper copies for sundry purposes, can provide further ideas.

Certificates from General Register Offices

Those purchased at either the London office (currently the Family Records Centre, before 1994 at St. Catherine's House, and prior to 1974 at Somerset House) or their postal department in Southport are headed:

'CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF BIRTH/MARRIAGE/ DEATH.....GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE' all on one line.

Below the personal information there are the phrases, *'CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a Register of Births/Marriages/Deaths in the Registration District of ...(District name)....'(or 'in the District above mentioned'),*

And '*Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE under the Seal of the said Office the...(date)...'*

Certificates from Local Register Offices

Genealogically acquired certificates from local Superintendent Registrars are headed:

'CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF BIRTH/MARRIAGE/ DEATH'
on the first line. Then another line proclaims
Pursuant to the:
Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953,
Births and Deaths Registration Acts 1836 to 1947,
Marriage Act 1949

or for other statutory purposes when reduced fees apply for example:

- *Issued for the purposes of The Elementary Education Act 1876* for entering or leaving school. For example Julia HOWES born 7 June 1884 obtained a copy on 10 December 1896, probably to enable her to leave school at age 12.

- *This Certificate is issued for the Purposes of Widows Pension Acts and for NO OTHER USE OF PURPOSE WHATEVER. Supplied at the Special Fee of 1/- [in 1945] applicable in certain Statutory Cases*

- Other such Statutory Purposes include:
  Family Allowances Act
  Social Security Act
  Industrial Injuries (Old Cases) Act
  War or National Savings Certificates
  National Savings Bank
  Premium Savings Bonds
  Savings Contracts
  Government Annuities
  and others

  Interesting examples have been described by Wood (2001) under the titles *Youth Employment* and *Age Verifications*.

Below the personal information is:

Certified to be a true copy of an entry in a register in my custody……(signed by) Superintendent Registrar or his designate. Note that the register is in the custody of the Superintendent Registrar of the Registration District noted at the top of the main body of the certificate, usually enclosed in an outlined box.

Codes in Top Right Hand Corner

This code on certificates obtained from a local Register Office can be interpreted as follows:

Type of certificate: Birth certificates will have B. Cert, marriages M. Cert., and deaths D. Cert. Underneath this is another line consisting of the source.

- Certificates obtained before the 1949 Act have either R.B.D. (meaning Registrar of Births & Deaths) or Church.

- Certificates obtained after the 1949 Act have S.R. (meaning Superintendent Registrar).

In the following examples only the main body (middle portion) of the certificates is usually reproduced.

Spelling & Illiteracy Problems

How many of us begin this task by thinking, "My family have always spelled our name this way"? Far too many, I'm sure, for how long is always? And for that matter what is the correct way? Were none of your ancestors illiterate beyond 1880? Are you positive that each registered his own death? Or was the informant a semi-literate neighbour who didn't know them that well anyway? We soon learn to become much, much more flexible in our attitude to spellings of names if we want to make any progress with our pedigree.

Incorrect Interpretation of Original

My mother's family of Thom were constantly plagued by mis-spellings on mail, and this is repeated in the civil registration indexes and certificates, as in Chart 23 where it is rendered as Thorn. The possibilities are endless.

CHART 23:
Birth Certificate of Sophia THOM 1838

Registration District Stepney 1838 **Birth in the Sub-district of** Limehouse **in the** County of Middlesex										
#	When & Where born	Name, if any	Sex	Name & surname of Father	Name, surname & Maiden surname of Mother	Occupation of Father	Signature, Description & Residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar	Name entered after registration
401	27 May 1838 James Street Limehouse	Sophia	Female	Francis Thorn	Sophia Thorn formerly Bisset	Mast Maker	Fra[s] Thorn, Father James Street Limehouse	1 June 1838	Aldophus Burnett Registrar	– – – –

CHART 24:
Birth Certificate of Emma DARTNELL 1852

Registration District Bexley 1852 **Birth in the Sub-district of** Bexley **in the** County of Kent										
#	When & Where born	Name if any	Sex	Name & surname of Father	Name, surname & Maiden surname of Mother	Occupation of Father	Signature, Description & residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar	Name entered after registration
350	13 July 1852 5.15 am Crayford	Emma	Girl	Henry Dardnell	Susan Dardnell formerly Brown	Laborer	Susan Dardnell Mother Crayford	21 Aug 1852	Samuel Levens Registrar	----

CHART 25:
Birth Certificate of Bertie Gardner 1892

Registration District Dartford
Registrar's Sub-district of Bexley **in the** County of Kent

#	When & Where born	Name, if any	Sex	Name & surname of Father	Name, surname & Maiden surname of Mother	Occupation of Father	Signature, Description & residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar	Name entered after registration
37	22 June 1892 1 London Road Crayford R.S.D.	Bertie	Boy	Thomas Gardener	Harriet Gardener formerly Rickett	Printer (journeyman)	X the mark of Harriet Gardener Mother, 1 London Road Crayford	5 Aug 1892	F.W.F. Ranger Registrar	– – – –

I hearby certify that the above is a true Copy of an Entry of Birth in a Register Book in my custody.
Witness my hand this *25th* **day of** *April 1906* Eustace J. Hobbs, Deputy Superintendent registrar

Semi-Literate or Careless Informant

In Chart 24 is an example of an informant who wasn't too fussy about spelling. A note from the local Superintendent Registrar says: 'Please note the spelling on the entry is DARDNELL not DARTNELL.' She signed, but did not seem to use the spelling used by everyone else in the family! On the other hand maybe she had a *code i' de dose* that day! Note that the time of day is given, even though this was not a twin or multiple birth; the Bexley registrar put all the times in.

Illiterate Informant

In Chart 25 we have an illiterate informant and perhaps a somewhat deaf registrar to boot. The rendering of Brickett as the commoner name Rickett takes it from one end of the alphabet to the other! The certificate was obtained when the child was approaching his 14th birthday, suggesting a need to establish age in order to leave school and begin an apprenticeship.

English & Welsh Birth Certificates – The Short Form Birth Certificate

For Births, always ask for the *full* certificate as the *short* certificate, although less expensive, does not give the parents' names, father's occupation, or addresses of residence and birth. There are two kinds:

1. Certificates of Registry of Birth

Obtainable from 1874, they provided a cheaper alternative of proof of registration than the copy extract of the full birth registration. They were never considered as good a legal document as a full birth certificate. An example is that of Francis THOM born in 1886 (Chart 26), this one probably being obtained on the date of registration.

CHART 26:
Short Form Certificate or Registry of Birth or Francis THOM 1886

Births and Deaths Registration Act 1874
CERTIFICATE of REGISTRY of BIRTH
I, the undersigned, Do hereby certify that the Birth of *Francis Thom*
Born on the *8th* **day of** *January 1886* **has been duly registered by me.**
Witness my hand, the *30th* **day of** *January 1886.*
N. Purdy, **Registrar of Births and Deaths**
Poplar **Sub-District.**

2. Modern Short Form Birth Certificate

These were introduced in 1947 as a legal document proving the date and place of birth but having the advantage of not disclosing the parents' names. This could be preferred for various reasons, especially illegitimacy. It is naturally possible to buy a short form certificate now for any past event, as in the example in Chart 27 where the certificate was obtained in 1998 for an event in 1881.

CHART 27:
Short Form Birth Certificate of
William E.W. BROWN 1881

CERTIFICATE OF BIRTH

Name and surname *William Ewart Gladstone BROWN*
Sex *Boy*
Date of Birth *ifteenth July 1881*
Place of Registration District : *West Ham*
Birth: Sub-district *Leyton*
I *G.J. Murray, Deputy* **Superintendent Registrar for the Registration District of** *Waltham Forest* **do hereby certify that the above particulars have been compiled from an entry in a register in my custody.**
Date *5.6.[19]98* *G.J. Murray*
L28-343 *Deputy* **Superintendent Registrar**

Family Historians hoping to save money by investing in one of these will be sadly disappointed in the amount of information given compared to the full certificate. It does not provide the all-important primary evidence linking the child to its parents, nor any of the other family details. There is one item that the short forms *do contain* that is not on the full certificates, but only for those born in 1939 and afterwards. This is the National Health Service Number, which used to be able to be used to trace a living person through the Department of Social Security (DSS). This service is no longer in operation for genealogical purposes, but only for cases of medical emergency or death of a close relative. In these cases, **only**, you can write to:

DSS Contributions Agency
Special Section A
Longbenton
Newcastle upon Tyne
England NE98 1YX

Further information on this subject can be found in Rogers' two books.

English & Welsh Birth Certificates – The Long Form Birth Certificate

There is a considerable amount of information given on birth certificates for England & Wales, and it is worth taking the trouble to understand each portion and column. These items and their genealogical value are now considered.

Heading: Where Obtained

The source of the certificate gives you clues as to the reliability of the data Is it a:

- ✓ Photocopy of original
- ✓ Photocopy of a copy (transcript)
- ✓ Copy of a copy!

Heading/District/Subdistrict/County

This gives you the location of the address and is especially helpful where there are several parishes with the same name in the country or even the county. For example, it is hardly useful knowing that the person was born at 12 High Street, Stone, Kent if you don't know *which* place called Stone. There are three of them in Kent alone:

- Stone-in-Oxney which is in Tenterden District
- Stone-near-Dartford in Dartford District
- Stone-near-Ospringe in Faversham District

The author's *Parishes and Registration Districts in England & Wales* is most helpful in showing the district applicable to over 18,000 places.

The Number

This is the entry number in the birth register and can be from 1-500. There were five entries per page and references are to page numbers not entry numbers, thus it is of no use genealogically.

Date of Birth

This is the best source for the date, but it isn't always true; creative adjustments are not uncommon to avoid paying a fine for late registration over 42 days. If the time of birth is given on the certificate, it usually means twins or other multiple birth, and was entered to indicate seniority. This can be checked by revisiting the birth indexes to see if there is another child registered on the same, previous or next page.

Occasionally, as in Bexley district in 1852, (See Dardnell example in Chart 24) the registrar put the time of birth on every certificate in his district. There are also early examples of the times of live twin births not being recorded. In a multiple birth, if only one baby was born alive then it will usually *not* have a time of birth written in.

A case was reported, in the Wiltshire FHS journal #46 page 48, of a father registering his daughter's birth date as being almost three weeks before the day she was born. This was done purposely so that when she reached 21 her inheritance would come a little sooner!

Place of Birth

The birth certificate is usually your best source for this information and can naturally lead you to finding the family on the prior and subsequent censuses. Most children were born at home, but this may have been the maternal grandmother's home, especially for a woman's first confinement. Check the address against that of the informant, the parents, and the grandparents.

Birth also commonly took place in temporary lodgings, a laying-in hospital, farm outbuildings, or in the workhouse. The infirmary of the local union workhouse was virtually the only source of free medical care until after WWII and many new mothers would have been cared for therein. The great majority of poor, illegitimate children first saw the light of day in the workhouse infirmary. There was a great stigma attached to workhouse residence, especially to birth in the workhouse, so registrars were instructed to write the street address rather than the name of the workhouse. Workhouses weren't completely eliminated until the Labour Government's medical reforms well after WWII. My own birth certificate reads that I was born at 1 Buckingham Road, Winslow, Bucks and this was the Winslow Union Workhouse.

If the address is far from the usual domicile of a single mother, she may have been sent away from home for the birth and an adoption, to hide the pregnancy from family and prying neighbours. In the early years of civil registration often only the name of the village, or parish in a town, was listed, rather than the detailed street address as is found in later registrations.

There are sometimes puzzling acronyms written after the street address in this column. They are not of any relevance to your genealogy, as they refer to:

R.D.	Rural District
R.S.D.	Rural Sanitary District
U.D.	Urban District
U.S.D.	Urban Sanitary District

Full Name of Child

The certificate is also the best source for the child's proper name, although the parents may have changed their minds by the time of christening and added or deleted names. Before 1969 no surname was given on a birth certificate; it was assumed from the surname of the parents. If the parents were married the child took its surname from its father; in practice this also applied to couples who were in a common-law arrangement, whether or not a previous spouse was still living. If the parents were not married and the father's name was not entered, then the child *should* have taken the mother's surname. When it was a joint registration then the child could take either surname.

The problem of not knowing what the child's surname was from the birth certificate was clarified in 1969. From this year onward, birth certificates include the child's surname.

Sex

Prior to 1 April 1969 this is given as boy or girl, and after this date as male or female. It is surprising how many errors are found in this seemingly straightforward piece of information. The registrar can make an error in various ways:

- The child was given a name more typically used for the other sex, for example, William for a girl or Shirley for a boy.
- The given name was one of those used by either sex such as Kim, Robin or Beverley.
- The spelling used for the name was not checked by the parents, for example Lesley/Lesley or Frances/Francis.
- An unusual name was given whose normal sexual connotation was unknown to the registrar.
- The registrar wrote the wrong one and illiterate parents could not check.
- Rarely, the sex cannot be determined at birth.
- A copying error at the time of certificate production.

These occurrences are not common but they can explain some problems you may have in finding all of the children in a family.

Full Name of Father

Theoretically, and in most cases, this will lead you to the next generation by giving the name needed to look up the parents' marriage. Remember that the name given was that in use at the time the child was born; this can be significant when a father's name has been changed for some reason, particularly for late-registered children.

Children born within the bounds of marriage were formerly always the legitimate heirs of the mother's husband according to the law, unless proof of her adultery was shown. Thus the father's name was vital for the inheritance of estates and titles, and even now legitimacy may affect the nationality of a child. In this discussion I have omitted any reference to the impact of modern fertility methods, and to DNA analysis of parenthood. The father's name is not given on the short form of the birth certificate, and only on the long form after 1875 if the parents were married, or he accompanied the mother to the registrar's office or signed an affidavit admitting paternity.

Between 1837 and 1874 some fathers of illegitimate children are named on certificates, but the rule that appeared in the middle of this period that a putative father not be allowed to sign the register was applied inconsistently. Since 1969 an unmarried mother can give a child the father's surname, but can only name the father if he attends with her to sign the register, (or in the rare case of a statutory declaration). His name could be added later upon re-registration.

From 1875 to 1968 an illegitimate child of Maria White and John Stevens registered as Jemima Stevens White, could spend her whole life thinking she was Jemima Stevens if her mother cohabited with the father.

Full Maiden Name of Mother

The maiden surname for the purposes of registering a birth is defined as *the name she was using when she first married.* This isn't necessarily her own surname at birth. If she had been born *Louisa TOPPING* but had become known by her stepfather's surname of *REMNANT* then on the birth of a child her maiden surname *should* be *Louisa REMNANT.*

Theoretically, and in most cases, the full maiden name will lead you to the next generation by giving the name needed to look up the parents' marriage. Her biological father's name *should* be given on her marriage certificate. Note that her name is not given on the short form of her child's birth certificate.

Mother's Surname: Where the birth was to a married, or purportedly married couple, the mother will be referred to in the form: ***Sarah DASHWOOD formerly STEVENS*** which indicates that her maiden name was STEVENS, or in the form: ***Jane BROWN formerly WHITE late GREEN*** which tells us that her maiden name was WHITE but that previous to the current marriage she had been married to a Mr.GREEN.

Illegitimate births to formerly married women *should* show all her previous surnames.

Cohabitation *should* be indicated by the form: ***Mary JONES otherwise Mary EVANS*** where JONES was the man's name and EVANS her maiden name. Likewise ***Mary WILLIAMS otherwise Mary JONES*** *formerly EVANS* indicates that her maiden name was EVANS, she married Mr. JONES but was now living with Mr. WILLIAMS.

This was how the rules were supposed to be followed; however it is a fact that many registrars did not understand them properly and exceptions frequently occur. A lot depended, too, on who registered the birth and how much they knew about the mother's marital history. If doubt persists, then getting birth certificates for other children in the family may help resolve the issue, as it can also with the range of spelling variations used.

From 1969 a certificate will include both the mother's maiden name and the name she was using when she married for the last time, if she had been married more than once.

Occupations of Parents

This detail is obviously not given on the short form birth certificate. It is a most useful way of keeping track of how the family made its livelihood, and usually distinctive enough to enable differentiation of several John & Sarah Browns in the same place. However, the actual word used for the occupation may vary depending on:

- How much the informant knew about the man and the nature of his work, for example, a wife may have known that he was a *postman* but not that his official description was *letter carrier* or *sorting office clerk*, which is how he may have described himself.

- The stage in the man's career, for example, he may have progressed from *servant* to *footman* to *butler*.

- The type of job he was doing at the time, for example, if he was a *master cabinet maker* he may have been working as a *carpenter* or *joiner* at the time of registration.

It is for these reasons that it is unwise to use this column as the only checking procedure with the national GRO office. Local registrars are much better at figuring these things out, and you could suggest to them a number of terms which might apply.

If a baby was posthumous then the word *deceased* will be included after the father's occupation. Sometimes the space has a line drawn through it or is blank. This could mean that the man had no occupation, or that he was presently unemployed, or that the informant didn't know what he did for a living, or even that the person who filled out the certificate for you forgot this column! Those who didn't actually *work* used terms such as *of independent means*. It is extremely unlikely that those supporting themselves illegally gave an honest answer to this question; they would usually have had a nominal trade in any case.

The father's occupation is especially useful when he was a soldier, sailor or with another service because the rank and regiment, department etc. would be given and these often lead to many other records. However, some birth certificates give only 'soldier' as the father's occupation. A precise rank and regiment is extremely useful in obtaining the father's army discharge papers. Many men spent a few years in the army, and getting a birth certificate of a child born during this period will enable you to delve into the father's army records. The attestion certificate will give his exact age at the date of joining the army and the parish and county of his birth will also be recorded. The certificate in Chart 28 enabled me to trace a family through William East's posting to Canada and back again to England.

In Chart 29 the detailed information on father Samuel Batey gave me all kinds of leads to follow. However it should be mentioned that the marriage certificate gave a different navy number for the father! (Chart 41)

CHART 28:
Birth Certificate of Jabez EAST 1846

Registration District *Eastbourne* *1846* **Birth in the Sub-district of** *Eastbourne* **in the** *County of Sussex*										
#	When & Where born	Name, if any	Sex	Name & surname of Father	Name, surname & Maiden surname of Mother	Occupation of Father	Signature, Description & residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar	Name entered after registration
413	23 September 1846 at Eastbourne	Jabez	Boy	William East	Margaret East formerly Mills	Sergeant in The Royal Artillery	W. East Father Eastbourne	28 Oct 1846	George Wilson Registrar	----

CHART 29:
Birth Certificate of Edith Grace Batey 1917

Registration District Mile End of Town 1917 **Birth in the Sub-district of** M.E.O.T. South Western **in the** County of London										
#	When & Where born	Name, if any	Sex	Name & surname of Father	Name, surname & Maiden surname of Mother	Occupation of Father	Signature, Description & residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar	Name entered after registration
4,198	25 Feb 1917 Mothers Home 396 Commercial Road	Edith Grace	Girl	Samuel Batey	Winifred Edith Maria Batey formerly Eves	Stoker 73016 *HMS* Commonwealth , Royal Navy, 7 Stratfield Road Bromley by Bow	W.E.M. Batey, Mother 396 Commercial Road	2 Mar 1917	A.S. Carter Registrar	– – – –

The mother's occupation was formerly only given when the child was illegitimate, but from April 1995 there is a space for this information. Knowing that the mother had a paid occupation in addition to her household duties gives us more insight into her life. You will often find on censuses that mothers did have paid work: commonly needlework, charing (housework), or taking in laundry or lodgers. In the 19th century she typically needed it in order to make ends meet, although there were a few women who had careers even then.

Informant's Signature, Address, & Relationship to the Child

This information does not appear on the short form. There was a list of eligible informants from 1837, with more accurate information to be expected from those at the top of the list:

- ✓ The mother; but it was not uncommon for the child's grandmother to register her daughter's illegitimate child as her own and to raise it.
- ✓ The father, if he is married to the mother. This would include the wife's husband, even if he was not the biological father, as the law stated that he was still responsible for the child.
- ✓ A person present at the birth, which could include (usually female) relatives, midwife (male or female), or neighbour.
- ✓ The owner or occupier of the house or institution. One frequently saw the master of a workhouse, or hospital staff, particularly where the mother had died or was incapable, or the child was illegitimate or born away from the normal residence.

- ✓ The person in charge of the child, and this could include anyone from the father of an illegitimate child [when he couldn't sign in his capacity as father], master of the workhouse for an orphan, or whoever looked after the young infant.

The informant was usually one of the parents and if their address was the same as the birth address this would indicate a home birth, the most usual kind at least in the 19th century. If the informant was a relative you could broaden your knowledge of the family as the relationship should be given. The address could be used to check against trade directories and censuses. Note whether the informant actually signed or just made a mark. An illiterate person could hardly check the details and spelling in the entry so you are left with the registrar's best guess about them.

That said, it doesn't necessarily follow that someone who could not write their name also could not read. Plenty of little dame schools would teach reading, but you needed to pay extra to learn writing. In a similar vein, it would be nice to be able to see the *actual signature,* rather than a transcript, to ascertain how fluent it was. Many people's sole skill in writing was a simple signature, so one mustn't assume beautiful penmanship.

After 1875, it would be understood that the parents were not married to each other at the time of the child's birth if they *both* had to sign as informants. This is termed a *joint registration* and applies even if the parents were both using the same surname.

Also, after 1875, it became possible to register the child in the parent's home district even when the birth had taken place in another district. The particulars were simply forwarded to the birth district register office. In such a case the registrar would copy the informant's name and then write *by declaration dated.*

Place of Birth of Both Parents

This has only been given since July 1969, but will greatly assist in the identification of the parents' births and christenings, especially those with common names.

When Registered

It is always interesting to see whether the birth was indeed registered within the prescribed 42 days. The date of registration determined in which quarter the birth would be indexed, thus children born in December were often registered the next year. Conversely if you only look at the indexes you won't know which day, month or even year in which November and December babies were born.

Signature of Registrar

The registrar in the local register office where the birth was registered was usually the sole signatory, and his or her title was also given. If the superintendent registrar of the district also signed it meant that there was something unusual about the registration. Most commonly it was late or a re-registration, so you should carefully check the time span between birth and registration dates and investigate further if the circumstances are as yet unknown to you.

Name Entered After Registration

This section would typically have a line drawn through it. Only when parents took the trouble to go back to the register office to add or change a given name would there be something written here. The addition was supposed to be made to the indexes at the same time, but many weren't, and you may be looking at an earlier index edition anyway. You will therefore find many people who were registered with one name, but christened with a different one, or with added middle names, spelling changes, or the order of given names was changed. If the child was not registered under the name they were known as later in life:

- Find the christening to give the parents' names, address and possibly the birth date.

- Look for other children registered in the right place at the right time and check with the local superintendent registrar to see which parents are the right ones.

Affidavit

This lower section included the date the certificate was obtained. Look at the date, the reason (the Act) and figure our *why* it was need. The date of issuance of the birth certificate for Bertie Gardner possessed by the family (Chart 25) was 25 April 1906. Why was a copy required in 1906? He was born in June 1892, was apprenticeship age and was thus soon to leave school.

Special Situations

Illegitimacy

The family historian is bound to run into this possible ancestral situation sooner or later. Sometimes the father can be found quite simply because he is named on the birth certificate, but often he is not named. The child may have been registered by the mother under the father's name, even if she wasn't married to him at the time. This would have been legal before 1874 but was still done afterwards, and rarely discovered because districts were so large the registrar wouldn't have known everybody. If a birth registration is not found, it is worth checking for it under the surnames of any males with whom the mother was associated. For example, the censuses will tell you the names of employers and fellow servants who lived in the same house.

Lack of a father's name on the birth certificate doesn't necessarily preclude further ancestral research as the Poor Law, the welfare system of the time, had a number of ways of finding delinquent fathers and causing them to pay for the upkeep of their children. A further book in this program examines the Poor Law and Parish Chest materials that can be used for this purpose. It was extremely common during the 19th century for single mothers to give their offspring the father's surname as a middle name. In such cases it is always worthwhile looking for a subsequent marriage of this mother to a father with that surname. About 10 percent of firstborns arrived before their parents got around to tying the knot!

In many cases of illegitimacy the mother took legal proceedings for maintenance against the father of her child. Thus it pays to search Petty Sessions, Magistrates Court records, Police Summons books and others that your county Record Office can recommend, where these are available. Further details on this aspect can be found in McLaughlin's *Twentieth Century Research*.

Example Where Parents Never Married

In the example in Chart 30 the child was registered by its mother with both parents names, and appears on the index as both Joseph Brickett and Joseph Liversage. This child grew up as Joseph Brickett, and on the 1851 census was living with his grandparents Brickett and shown as their child. One has to wonder whether he ever knew the truth?

Example Where Parents Married Later

Anne Newall, in Chart 31, was illegitimate as can be seen from the form of the entry, and the fact that her parents did not marry until 15 August 1841. Strangely, the birth index *only* lists her under the father's surname, Newall, and the child grew up as Anne Newall.

CHART 30:
Birth Certificate of Joseph BRICKETT 1843

Registration District Edmonton 1843 **Birth in the Sub-district of** Edmonton **in the** County of Middlesex										
#	When & Where born	Name, if any	Sex	Name & surname of Father	Name, surname & Maiden surname of Mother	Occupation of Father	Signature, Description & residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar	Name entered after registration
243	21 Jan 1843 Chase Side Southgate	Joseph	Boy	William Liversage	Elizabeth Brickett	Blacksmith	The mark X of Elizabeth Brickett Mother, Chase Side Southgate	7 Feb 1843	Daniel Judd Registrar	– – – –

CHART 31:
Birth Certificate of Anne NEWALL or SPROSTON 1839

Registration District Northwich 1839 **Birth in the Sub-district of** Middlewich **in the** County of Chester										
#	When & Where born	Name, if any	Sex	Name & surname of Father	Name, surname & Maiden surname of Mother	Occupation of Father	Signature, Description & residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar	Name entered after registration
355	28 September 1839 Newton	Anne	Girl	Joseph Newall	Prudence Sproston	Ship Carpenter	X mark of Prudence Sproston, mother Newton	15 October 1839	John Hadfield Registrar	----

The situation of illegitimate children whose parents married later was clarified in 1926 under the Legitimacy Act whereby former children were legitimized, and a revised certificate would be issued after re-registration. This will be the only document now obtainable, except for very exceptional circumstances. There are several key items to watch for in a re-registration certificate:

- The difference between the date of birth and the date of registration may be many years.
- The informant will sign *By declaration signed...date, [just before registration date]*.
- Date of registration will have the phrase *On the authority of the Registrar General*.
- Both the registrar and the superintendent registrar will sign in the penultimate column if the registration was more than three months after the birth date.
- The mother's surnames will be in a different form, for example: ***Sophia ALLEN formerly EDWARDS now GUNNER*** Indicating that her maiden name, (name at time of first marriage), was EDWARDS, she married a Mr. ALLEN, but is now going under the name of GUNNER. She may or may not be married to Mr. Gunner but this is the surname that the child will now bear.

In most cases before WWII separated persons who entered a common-law relationship were only free to marry when the previous spouse died, which may be many years after they had a family. In such cases the children might only take their father's surname when their parents married.

Example of Disguised Illegitimacy

An extremely common situation is where the form of the entry indicates that the child is legitimate, but no marriage could be found for the parents because the union was common law, as seen in Chart 32.

Another way to avoid the public consequences of having different surnames within the family was for the mother to change her surname to that of the father. Thus any children would also have the same name and appear legitimate. Such changes could be done casually, or even quite legally but very quietly, and are rather hard to track down.

Ancestor Born Just Before Civil Registration

Get a birth certificate for a younger sibling and then check that the marriage for the couple took place before your ancestor was born as well. You must prove that it is the same mother, as death in childbirth was very common and it is surprising how many Williams married three Marys!

I had this problem with my ancestor Ann Louisa Hammant born in 1833. I knew from the census that she had a younger brother Henry born in 1839 so I got his birth certificate (Chart 33). I then found the marriage of Michael James Hammant to Sarah Ann Louisa Topping on 16 June 1832 in the next parish, North Cray, Kent.

CHART 32:
Birth Certificate of Grace DASHWOOD THOM 1914

Registration District Medway 1914 **Birth in the Sub-district of** Gillingham **in the** County of Kent										
#	When & Where born	Name, if any	Sex	Name & surname of Father	Name, surname & Maiden surname of Mother	Occupation of Father	Signature, Description & residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar	Name entered after registration
338	7 July 1914 333 Canterbury Street, U.D.	Grace Dashwood	Girl	Dashwood John Thom	Lilian Grace Thom formerly Eves	Grocer's Manager	L.D. Thom Mother, 333 Canterbury Street Gillingham	14 Aug 1914	T. Groom Registrar	----

CHART 33:
Birth Certificate of Henry JOHN HAMMANT 1839

Registration District Dartford 1839 **Birth in the Sub-district of** Bexley **in the** County of Kent										
#	When & Where born	Name, if any	Sex	Name & surname of Father	Name, surname & Maiden surname of Mother	Occupation of Father	Signature, Description & residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar	Name entered after registration
45	10 Aug 1839 Bexleyheath Bexley	Henry John	Boy	Michael Hammant	Sarah Ann Louisa Hammant formerly Topping	Calico printer	The X mark of Sarah Ann Louise Hammant, Mother Bexleyheath	6 Sep 1839	Joseph Ale Registrar	----

Another way of finding the mother's maiden name of a child born before civil registration, is to look for a second marriage occurring after 1 July 1837 particularly for the mother if she was widowed. She will likely marry using her husband's surname, but her father's name should be given on the certificate and his surname is *usually* the same as her maiden name.

His, Hers & Ours

So many women died in childbirth, before WWI especially, and you may be oblivious to this unless you look hard. The existence of a stepmother and half-brothers and -sisters is an important facet of your family history. One should take steps to ensure that appropriate documentation is obtained to actually prove these points. If the new wife brought children from a previous liaison or marriage then you will have a complex situation to unravel. However, this will provide a better understanding of your ancestor's childhood and personal network of relatives.

For the complexities of the modern *theirs and ours* situations caused by modern reproductive technology I refer you to the two articles by Overall.

Siblings' Certificates

Obtaining birth certificates of siblings has many uses:

- The first and last children in the family will provide an affirmation that they have the same mother or, alternatively, open your eyes to further family associations.
- Those born close to census dates will provide addresses to check on the census.
- Any other certificates will provide addresses to search in local archives for photographs of actual buildings, or perhaps you could visit them yourself if they still exist.
- A series of certificates will illustrate the changes or advancement in occupation that the father underwent during the period. This could lead to city directories and trade or professional sources to flesh out his background. Perhaps you will find that he was in the army or navy for a time; this would give you additional historical documents to be able search for more family history details.

Adoption

Official records of adoption did not begin until 1 January 1927. Unless you already know the original surname of the child, which is unlikely, it will be extremely difficult to proceed further. Most adoptions were purely private arrangements with no paper trail to follow, but were often done within the greater family circle. What we refer to nowadays as *guardianship* and *foster care* were both loosely called *adoption* prior to 1927 and the child may have used the guardian's or foster father's surname.

Since 75 percent of adopted children were originally illegitimate, one tack is to look for all the unmarried young ladies in the family group and try and find a birth or christening of an illegitimate child for one of them. Then track this child—if it suddenly *disappears* at the same time as the adoption occurs, you have a good working hypothesis!

Other avenues include adopters' wills, apprenticeships, Poor Law records, private charities and orphanage records. The boom of babies after WWI created a surge in adoption owing to the declining birthrate amongst the middle class. By 1920 there were about 20 adoption agencies in Britain but private arrangements continued after the 1926 legislation that resulted in the official records starting the following year.

The word *adopted* is noted in the margin of an adoptee's birth certificate. This can cause unexpected confusion because a lot of adoptions are actually done by the natural mother and her new husband, now the step-father to the child.

Adoption certificates replace the original birth certificates for official purposes and are issued only by the Registrar General, not by Superintendent Registrars.

They include the following information:

- Date of birth.
- Registration District of birth (if in England & Wales) from 1959, otherwise, and before this date, only the country of birth.
- Date of adoption.
- Name of child being adopted.
- Names and address of the adoptive parents.
- Name of the authority making the order.

There is no reference to the child's natural parents and his or her original name.

The original birth certificate may be accessed only by the adopted person over age 18 after receiving advice from:

The General Register Office
The Adoptions Section
Office for National Statistics
Smedley Hydro, Southport
Merseyside, England PR8 2HH
Telephone: 0151-471-4831

More information can be obtained from their leaflets on the subject:

- ACR 100 Access to British records
- ACR 110 The Adoption Contact Register
- and at the website www.ons.gov.uk/

There are many other websites devoted to adoptees' genealogical problems. The Adoption Contact Register is maintained by the Registrar General and adoptees and parents or relatives of adoptees may pay a fee to have their names added to it. Both parties will be informed if a match is found, however, only the adoptee will be given the name(s) and addresses of birth parents/relatives. Application forms are obtainable from the above address.

There is also a rarely used method whereby application to the courts can permit the Registrar General to divulge the link between the original and adoption birth records. It is usually only utilized for inheritance or medical cases.

A useful reference is Stafford's *Where to Find Adoption Records*, and the National Organization for Counselling Adoptees and their Parents (NORCAP) offers assistance at a reasonable cost to those wishing to trace adoptive relatives. Contact:

NORCAP
112 Church Road,
Wheatley, Oxfordshire,
England OX33 1LU
Telephone: 01865-875000

A source for orphaned and abandoned British children sent abroad is http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/britishhomechildren, the website and articlue by Perry Snow.

Overseas Birth Certificates

An example of a *Birth at Sea* is shown in Chart 34. The mother's maiden name is not given, but note that the name of the ship provides the detail necessary to search for the captain's log for the event. This could prove more or less informative depending on the captain's style.

CHART 34: Birth Certificate of Winifred SARAH GOODMAN 1865

General Register and Record Office of Shipping and Seamen
Llantrisant Road, Cardiff

DA.20345/53

CERTIFIED EXTRACT FROM A RETURN OF BIRTH

Name of Ship *"Alfred"* **Official Number** *25514*

Names & Descriptions of Parents	Date of Child's Birth	Sex of Child	Christian Name given to Child	When give	By whom Christened
Henry & Caroline GOODMAN	*1 Jan 1865*	*Female*	*Winifred Sarah*	–	–

Examined by *UMC* **Certified to be a true Extract from a List**

Fee Two shillings and sixpence rendered (including fee for search)

Pursuant to Section 273 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1854, and deposited on record in this Office.

(Signed)

Assistant REGISTRAR GENERAL OF SHIPPING AND SEAMEN

Dated this *18th day of May 1953*

A *Marine Birth* is shown in Chart 35, given by the captain for his own child, and shows the mother's maiden name as well as their usual address, and details of the ship he was on.

CHART 35:
Birth Certificate of William GUY BROWNE 1853

CERTIFIED COPY of an ENTRY IN THE MARINE REGISTER
Pursuant to the provisions of the Merchant Shipping Acts 1894 and 1970
and the Birth & Death Registration Act 1953

Liverpool
Feb^{y} 25th 1854

Sir,
I beg leave to furnish you with a copy of the minute which has been made in the log book of the Barque 'Jane Morice'– respecting the birth of my son William Guy Browne.

Nov^{r} 9th 1853 at 2 am Mrs. Browne was delivered of a male child in lat. 15° 40' N and 29° 19' W.
The child's name is William Guy Browne.
The Father's Joseph Browne.
The Mother's maiden name Ann Floyd Evett Chapman.
Father's profession–Master Mariner.
Signature Joseph Browne.
Residence No. 8 Chester Street, Toxteth Park, Liverpool.

I hearby certify that this is a true copy of the minute made in the log book of the Barque 'Jane Morice' of Liverpool on the 9th day of Nov^{r} 1853. Witness my hand this 25th day of Feb^{y} 1954.

(Signed) Joseph Browne.
Captain of Barque 'Jane Morice'

A true copy George Graham
Registrar General

A birth certificate from the Regimental Registers appears as Chart 36, and does not show the mother's maiden name but gives dates for both birth and baptism. The soldier's records in the Royal Bengal Fusiliers can now be a source of further information for this family.

Comparison of Christening & Birth Information

Typical entries for the birth and christening of a child are shown in Charts 37 and 38. Note that the father's occupation is shown in slightly different format in each, but that the mother's maiden name is *only* shown on the birth certificate. There is a bonus in this particular christening entry in that the curate had also added the names of the godparents, George Jupp and George Godley at the side of the entry.

CHART 36:
Birth Certificate of Florence BETTERIDGE 1876

CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF BIRTH An entry in an Army Register Book of Births and Baptisms (Deaths and Marriages) **Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages (Special Provisions) Act 1957** Half Yearly Return of Baptisms solemnized in the Garrison of Valletta in the Island of Malta from 1st January to 30 June 1876.							
Date of Birth of the Child	When Baptized	Child's Christian Name	Parent's Names		Abode	Quality, Trade or Profession	By whom the ceremony was performed
			Christian	Surname			
9th February 1876	1st March 1876	Florence	Alfred and Letitia	BETTERIDGE	Cottonera	Sergeant 101st R.B.F.	I.J. Torr, Acting Commanding Officer
Certified to be a true copy of an Entry relating to the Birth and Baptism of Florence BETTERIDGE							

CHART 37:
Birth Certificate of Albert JAMES JUPP 1851

Registration District Cuckfield 1851 **Birth in the Sub-district of** Hurstpierpoint **in the** County of Sussex										
#	When & Where born	Name, if any	Sex	Name & surname of Father	Name, surname & Maiden surname of Mother	Occupation of Father	Signature, Description & residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar	Name entered after registration
14	2 April 1851 Hurstpierpoint	Albert James	Boy	James Jupp	Ann Jupp formerly Richardson	Keeper	James Jupp Father Hurstpierpoint	17 April 1851	Billy Harris Registrar	----

CHART 38:
Parish Register Christening entry of Albert JAMES JUPP 1851

Baptisms solemnized in the Parish of Hurstpierpoint **In the County of** Sussex **in the Year** 1851						
When Baptized	Child's Christian Name	Parent's Names		Abode	Quality, Trade or Profession	By whom the ceremony was performed
		Christian	Surname			
1851 May 4 **No. 395**	Albert James son of	James & Ann	JUPP	Hurstpierpoint	Game Keeper	F.E. Towers Curate

English & Welsh Marriage Certificates

There is a considerable amount of information given on marriage certificates for England & Wales, and it is worth taking the trouble to understand each portion and column. These items and their genealogical value are now considered. Note that the information required for a marriage certificate has not changed since 1837. Neither has the fact that the informants of the particulars, even if literate, were probably in no state to check the entry for accuracy and spelling errors!

Heading: Where Obtained

The source of the certificate gives you clues as to the reliability of the data. Is it a:

- ⇨ Photocopy of original
- ⇨ Photocopy of a copy (transcript)
- ⇨ Copy of a copy!

Heading: District

The same applies here as for births. The marriage usually took place in the bride's parish, and if this was in the same district as the husband's job, (where they went to live), then the children would be registered in the same district.

Name of Church/Parish/County

Typically the church building belonged to the denomination under whose rites a marriage was performed. This may not be so for smaller sects without their own designated buildings. Check these particulars carefully to give you clues as to where to look for christenings and burials for the family.

The place of marriage is a good place to start looking for the wife's birth or christening, unless a census indicates otherwise. The example in Chart 39 shows a Wesleyan Methodist marriage and thus one of the registrars had to be in attendance as well as the minister. There is no district of Portsea Island any more; it's covered by Portsmouth district and is now in Hampshire not Southampton. This groom was born as William Henry, but only used his first name at marriage.

Number

This is the entry number in the marriage register and can be from 1-500. It is of no use genealogically.

Date of Marriage

A marriage certificate is second only to the parish register entry as the most reliable source for the date of marriage. Note that in Chart 39 the marriage took place on Christmas Day, which was rather a popular date as it was one of the few holidays in the year, thus wages were not lost.

Name of Husband & Wife

This refers to what was thought to be a proper usage of names. A woman should use her maiden name if single, or her previous husband's name if widowed, divorced, bigamous or previously in a common-law relationship. However, not every case was as simple as that. The name she used at marriage may not be the same as the name given as her maiden name on the birth certificate of a subsequent child. This problem may be solved if she appears on the next census with children from a former marriage.

They should bear the surname of their father, and you will then know which name is her maiden name and which one is her former married name, even if that was a common-law relationship.

Beware, also, the situation where a man married two ladies named Sarah. You may see a list of christenings, or find them on a census and assume they are all one family, but the marriage to the second Sarah will not be found before the birth of the first child in this double flock. If your ancestor is one of the younger children and you have dutifully purchased a birth certificate, it may also be necessary to purchase one for the eldest child to see if the mother's maiden name is the same! In cases such as these, since 1953, one should also beware of the re-registration of children to legitimize them.

Age of Husband & Wife

The age listed will often give a good estimate of the year of birth. However, what was important was really whether the parties had reached the age of consent or majority, which was 21 until 1969 when it was lowered to 18. Legal age for marriage for minors, with a *written parental consent form*, was 14 for boys and 12 for girls until 1929 when it was changed to 16 for both sexes. Parties who had been widowed before reaching the age of 21 were treated as majors, not minors.

Many ministers simply put down *of full age*, *over 21* or just the number *21* when they intended to mean that the party was aged 21 years or over. From 1837 to about 1847 about three quarters of marriage partners were registered as *full age*; after that more accurate ages are given, but the term *full age* was still in use as late as the 1950s. These phrases and the number 21 should sound alarm bells to the diligent researcher, alerting them to confirm the age from other documents.

On average, and this must be used with caution in individual cases, men married women who were about two years younger than themselves. The actual age of marriage was related to social class and occupation, a labourer typically married at 24 and a professional man at 29 or 30.

Couples would tend to minimize the age difference between them, especially if the bride was older than the groom. Thus, with couples over 21 or marrying with parental consent under that age, if the groom is stated as being younger than the bride you can be reasonably certain that he was no older than stated, and he may have been younger.

Similarly the bride would not have been any younger than she stated and may have been older. A rather extreme example is that of Grace Chowins who married William Eves in 1887. William was 21 and Grace *said* she was 26, but I have her birth certificate from 1849 and she was actually 38! They only had three children, I wonder if William ever figured out why?

Chart 40 shows a typical entry giving *of full age* which means that the person was age 21 or over, or wanted the vicar to believe they were! Note that in Wales, so many people have the same surname that it would be dangerous to assume a relationship between the vicar Thomas J. Hughes and the bridegroom. The witness David Hughes may be a relative, but it would be difficult to prove *which* David Hughes in the village unless signatures were compared. This is a transcribed copy, so a photocopy of the original parish register should be obtained for this purpose.

CHART 39:
Marriage Certificate of Willam DASHWOOD & Harriet ANNIE CAPLIN 1880

Registration District Portsmouth
1880 **Marriage solemnized at** Arundel Street Chapel **in the**
District of Portsea Island **in the** County of Southampton

#	When Married	Name & Surname	Age	Condition	Rank or Profession	Residence	Father's name & surname	Rank or Profession of Father
139	25th December 1880	William DASHWOOD Harriet Annie CAPLIN	31 years 20 years	Bachelor Spinster	Cabinet Maker – – – –	20 Nelson Square 2 Cottage Grove	William DASHWOOD (deceased) Henry CAPLIN	Laborer Laborer

Married in the Arundel Street Chapel according to the Rites & Ceremonies of the Wesleyans **by** certificate. **by me** Geo Wood Wesleyan Minister

This marriage was solemnized between us Wm Dashwood, H.A. Caplin

In the Presence of us James Bartlett, Matilda Dorey

Chas. M. Rand Deputy Registrar

CHART 40:
Marriage Certificate of Thomas HUGHES & Mary DAVIES 1864

Registration District Holywell
1864 **Marriage solemnized at** the Parish Church **in the** Parish of Llanasa
District of **in the** County of Flint

#	When Married	Name & Surname	Age	Condition	Rank or Profession	Residence	Father's name & surname	Rank or Profession of Father
361	29 Oct 1864	Thomas Hughes Mary Davies	of full age of full age	Widower Spinster	Labourer ----	Gwespyr Plasgullan	Thomas Hughes Thomas Davies	Labourer Farmer

Married in the Parish Church **by** **after** Banns **by me**

This marriage was solemnized between us The mark X of Thomas Hughes
The mark X of Mary Davies

In the Presence of us David Hughes
The mark X of Elizabeth Jones

Thos. J. Hughes
Vicar

CHART 41:
Marriage Certificate of Samuel BATEY & Winifred E.M. EVES 1916

1916 **Marriage solemnized at** the Register Office **in the District of** Greenwich **in the County of** London

#	When Married	Name & Surname	Age	Condition	Rank or Profession	Residence	Father's name & surname	Rank or Profession of Father
163	22nd September 1916	Samuel Batey	26 years	Bachelor	Stoker Royal Naval Reserve *HMS* Commonwealth No 7136	Naval Reserve Barracks, Chatham	Johnson Batey (deceased)	Blast Furnaceman
		Winifred Edith Maria Eves	25 years	Spinster		43 Elverson Road Greenwich	William Eves	Postman

Married in the Register Office **by** Certificate

This marriage was solemnized between us S. Batey, W.E. Eves

In the Presence of us L. Spink, Maude Crawley

Before me H.K. Lewis, Registrar SamuelSaw junr, Supt. Regr

CHART 42: Marriage Certificate of Thomas GARDNER & Ann HAMMANT 1857

Registration District Stepney
1857 **Marriage solemnized at** the Parish Church
in the Parish **of** St. Anne Limehouse **in the** County of Middlesex

#	When Married	Name & Surname	Age	Condition	Rank or Profession	Residence	Father's name & surname	Rank or Profession of Father
316	April 5 1857	Thomas Gardner Ann Hammant	Full Full	Bachelor Spinster	Silk Printer – – – –	Salmon Lane Salmon Lane	William Gardner Michael Hammant	Baker Calico printer

Married in the Parish Church **according to the** Rites & ceremonies **of the** Established Church after Banns **by me** E.R. Jones

This marriage was solemnized between us Thomas Gardner
Ann Hammant X her mark

In the Presence of us Frederick Hammant
Mary Ann French X her mark

Condition of Husband & Wife

This refers to their marital condition rather than to their health, state of trepidation or degree of inebriety resulting from the night before! One will see bachelor, widower or divorcé for the man; and spinster, widow or divorcée for the woman. In most cases they will alert you to a previous marriage and its outcome. However some whose former spouses had died or been divorced reverted to their bachelor/spinster status. The average length of a marriage in the mid 19th century was well under 20 years, because of the state of medical science at the time. In particular women frequently died in childbirth, whilst war and disease took its toll of their husbands; 9 percent of brides in 1851 were widows.

It is also possible to find ladies describing themselves as widows in order to account for the presence of a child who was actually illegitimate. If they were talented they would carefully adjust their father's surname as well, leading to all kinds of confusion for their genealogically-minded descendants. There were plenty of bigamous marriages and none of these parties can have been truthful about their marital condition either. These marital or paternal *adjustments* were obviously easier to carry out if the witnesses were not from that side of the family. Between 1858 and 1952 divorcé(e)s should be described in the following terms: *divorced husband of (maiden name of former wife)* or *divorced wife of (name of former husband)*. If the party was the respondent to a divorce, one will also see the phrase *from whom a divorce was obtained.* After 1952 the phrase for indicating a divorce became *previous marriage dissolved.*

From 1837 to 1970 the parties to marriages that had been annulled reverted to their previous status, but from 1971 you see the phrase *previous marriage annulled.*

Seven Year Absence

Any woman who had not heard of her husband for seven years was free to marry again; this being grounds for a quasi-divorce. For example, Ann Smith married on 13 May 1866 at Chislehurst, Kent and her condition was described as *supposed to be a widow* with the further note *her former husband deserted her and has not been heard of for 14 years*. It may not have been a coincidence that transportation to one of the colonies was set at 7 years minimum. Forsaken wives would then not have been charges on the poor rates for the rest of their lives if they could remarry. A most complex and fascinating case concerning a seven year absence was reported by Roser.

Occupation of Husband & Wife

Occupations can be good distinguishing characteristics and certainly add to the knowledge of the family's circumstances. Chart 41 gives much detail of the father and his work, but his navy number is different from that quoted on his daughter's birth certificate (Chart 29). Sometimes occupations were exaggerated to impress the in-laws or the congregation.

Residence of Husband & Wife

Residence for the purpose of calling the banns had to be established for just one week prior to the first call, and so often the addresses given are those of local lodging houses, hotels or a friend's home. If the address given is the same for both parties don't necessarily assume they were living in sin! An address of convenience, such as a relative's home or lodging house would enable them to save the expense of having banns called in two parishes. In the early years of civil registration, often only the name of the village, or parish, in a town was given rather than the detailed street address as is found in later registrations.

Nevertheless, it is always smart to check this address at the previous and subsequent censuses to find if it was a family residence. With some luck they will be at home with Mum and Dad prior to marriage, and their parents will still be there with any younger siblings.

Fathers' Names & Surnames

In most cases the name appears and this can then be used to assist in finding the correct birth for his child. Sometimes the word *Deceased* appears either with the father's name, or very annoyingly, instead of it! This either means that he is dead, or that the informant wanted the vicar or registrar to believe so. Information on whether the father was alive or dead was not required. It is very important *not to assume* that just because it doesn't say *deceased* that the father is still alive. In the example in Chart 42, William Gardner died in 1837 and Michael Hammant in 1842, but the marriage of their children in 1857 does not indicate this.

In a case reported by Bultitude, the 1917 bride's father was wrongly shown as deceased. He died in 1921 and this daughter was the informant! I hypothesize that she was underage at the time of marriage and/or her father didn't approve of her marriage.

In the father's section, *illegitimate children* may have:

- ⇨ The real father's name if they knew it—the surname will be different from their own. For example, in 1856 Mary Ann Bartlett married Thomas Simmons in Longfield, Surrey. Her condition was *spinster illegitimate* and her father's name was given as James Grant.

- ⇨ The mother's name with or without the explanation of being illegitimate. When Eleanor Waghorn Bull married Robert Field in 1838 at Wrotham, Kent in the father's column was *Rebecca Bull reputed father John Waghorn.*

- ⇨ An invented father, and one is not to know whether they or their mother did the inventing! (See Henry Dartnell example in Chart 71) The grandfather's name may be used for this purpose, but whether this always indicates incest is doubtful.

- ⇨ A stepfather's name (knowingly or unknowingly).

- ⇨ A blank space.

In the case of a*dopted children*, the father is normally the adoptive, but not the biological father. Mary Cole, who married James Oldham in 1842 in Gosport, entered in this space *Unknown, being the adopted daughter of Henry & Mary Massey*.

Complete blank probably means illegitimate, but could also mean a child never knew the father, either because he had gone away or died young.

No first name for father could mean that the child is presuming a surname, but could also mean that the father was always referred to by mother as 'Mr. Brown' or 'Father'.

Father's surname different from that of the groom or spinster bride. This can imply illegitimacy, remarriage of mother and thus this is a stepfather, or foster parenting.

Fathers' Occupations

A distinctive characteristic that can identify a son or daughter, and be a useful family detail. Occupations can change over time however.

Rites & Ceremonies

The religious denomination of the ceremony may not be the same as that of the building used for it. Unless noted otherwise it refers to the parish church (Church of England, Anglican or Established Church) and the wording will read something like:

- *According to the Rites & Ceremonies of the Established Church* or *Church of England* or just *In the Parish Church*

A **Protestant Nonconformist** ceremony is indicated by wording such as:

- *According to the Rites & Ceremonies of the Particular Baptists/Wesleyan Methodists Congregationalists/ etc.* or

- *In the Baptist/etc. Church according to the Rites & Ceremonies of the Parties*

Quaker

- *According to the usages of the Society of Friends*

Jewish

- *According to the usages of the Jews*

Civil Ceremony

- *In the Register Office*

Authorized Buildings & Persons

Starting on 1 July 1837 marriages could only take place in a designated *registered building* with open doors, between 8 am and 12 noon and by an authorized person and two credible witnesses. The permitted hours were extended to 3 pm in 1886, and 6 pm in 1934. There were four major kinds of marriages allowed:

1. **Church of England marriages** conducted in an Anglican church or chapel by an authorized ecclesiastic who signed the entry.

2. **Jewish or Quaker marriages** where the person authorized to conduct the marriage signed the entry. Such marriages could take place anywhere in the country, and not necessarily in a building authorized for marriages. A Jewish marriage has to be recorded in the register of the husband's synagogue, thus the location of the marriage can be a long way from where it was registered.

3. **All other denominations**, including Catholic, and Protestant nonconformists, where the Superintendent Registrar or his deputy had to attend and signed the entry in addition to the minister or priest performing the ceremony.

   From 1898 other denominations could apply for their buildings to be approved for marriages. For entries conducted in these approved buildings the Authorized Person, who was usually the priest, or a member of the congregation, was permitted to be the sole signatory.

There was no longer a necessity for someone from the Registrar's Office to be present. Each building often kept its own marriage register book.

There were still many denominations that did not have their own buildings, or whose building did not chieve approved status. It was common for such a marriage to be conducted by their minister but in an approved building belonging to another denomination. In such a case the marriage is registered in the book belonging to the building as, by definition, their own denomination did not have its own marriage register book.

Many dissenting churches had no marriage registers of their own, hence the registrar brought his book with him for the ceremonies. The register office marriage book thus contains a mixture of register office civil ceremonies and marriages in chapels and meeting houses.

Lists of churches and other places authorized to perform marriages may be found in contemporary city directories, or from the annual Official List published by the Registrar General.

4. **Civil marriages** conducted at the Register Office by the Superintendent Registrar or his deputy.

   Since 1 April 1995 one can be married in a civil ceremony in a building other than the Register Office. This will be conducted by the Registrar and Superintendent Registrar of the district where the building is located. A considerable variety of edifices have been approved for this purpose, ranging from a stately home to a railway station!

   The 1837 introduction of civil marriage was not the first time this had been available in England, since it was possible for a few years during the Commonwealth period (1650s). In the 19th century civil ceremonies were more popular in the southwest and far north of England and in Wales. Numbers were small at first, only 2 percent by 1841, even though it was cheaper than a church wedding, one factor being the stigmatic association with the Poor Law and the workhouse. Ninety percent of marriages were still Church of England at this time. By 1900 about 10 percent of marriages were taking place in the register offices. Quite a contrast to the 1970s when most weddings were by civil ceremony, although the pendulum has now swung back somewhat towards ecclesiastical marriages. The current rate is about 60 percent favouring civil ceremonies, with younger couples opting for more traditional church weddings.

Notice of Marriage, or Licence

No matter where a couple married, there had to be due notice given. This could be in one of two ways, each of which could take several forms depending on what ceremony was chosen for the marriage itself

⇨ Notice to the public three weeks in advance, with a certificate being given to the groom that this had been done which he would then present to the person conducting the ceremony. There were three types:

- Anglican or Catholic Banns
- Nonconformist Notice of Marriage
- Superintendent Registrar's Notice of Marriage (also known as Authority for Marriage)

⇨ By sworn affidavit to an authority that no impediment to the marriage existed, with a licence being given to the groom to present to the person conducting the ceremony. There were several types including:

- Anglican Marriage Common Licence (issued by a Bishop or Archdeacon)
- Catholic Marriage Common Licence
- Archbishop's Faculty Licence
- Vicar-General's Licence
- Archbishop's Special Licence
- Superintendent Registrar's Licence

By Banns

A certificate from the spouse's parish had to be brought to the marriage parish to show that banns had been properly called there. They rarely survive, but in Totternhoe, Bedfordshire one finds this certificate remaining with the parish marriage register.

CHART 43:
A Banns Certificate 1922

To the Minister of the Parish of *Totternhoe*
This is to certify that Banns of Marriage between *Harold Alfred Gaskin bachelor* **of the Parish of** *New Sleaford* **in the County of** *Lincoln* **and** *Alice Martha King spinster* **of the Parish of** *Totternhoe* **in the County of** *Bedfordshire* **were published in the Parish Church of** *New Sleaford* **aforesaid, on the three Sundays underwritten; that is to say:**
On Sunday the *19* **day of** *March* **A.D.** *1922*
26 **day of** *March* **A.D.** *1922*
2nd **day of** *April* **A.D.** *1922*
and no Impediment alleged. As witness my Hand
Dated this *5th* **Day of** *April 1922*
J. Evans, curate

Typically the phrase under the entry will say *by banns* and occasionally *by banns with certificate* indicating that a certificate from the other spouse's parish has been received. It should have been received in all cases when two people from different parishes were wed, but few ministers actually wrote it up specifically like this.

According to the 1836-37 legislation a letter should also have been sent to the Board of Guardians of the Poor Law Union about the intended register office marriage. In the early days of civil registration the Clerk to the Guardians was often also appointed as Superintendent Registrar because the areas covered by each were the same. One sometimes sees reference to this on the certificate as *after due publication before the Board of Guardians*. The Poor Law Union records, especially the Minute Books are therefore worth checking into where marriages are difficult to find.

By Licence

There are several kinds, the most usual being the *common licence* obtained from a senior Church of England clergyman, either a Bishop or Archdeacon, of the diocese in which both parties resided and in which the marriage was to be celebrated. For those who lived in different dioceses a licence had to be obtained from the *Vicar-General*. If they lived in different provinces, for example, Canterbury and York, then a *Faculty Office Licence* had to be obtained from the Archbishop of Canterbury.

If the marriage was to take place in a diocese other than that of either of the parties, then a *Special Licence* was necessary. This could be issued by either Archbishop (York or Canterbury) or by the Vicar-General. Examples of an Archbishop's Licence is in Chart 44, and a Special Licence for a royal wedding in Chart 45.

CHART 44:
A Marriage Licence from the Archbishop of Canterbury 1865

Charles Thomas, by Divine Providence, Archbishop of Canterbury, Primate of all England and Metropolitan,

TO OUR WELL BELOVED IN CHRIST, *John Parker of the Parish of Prongland in the County of Norfolk a Bachelor and Maria Heath Vlieland of the Parish of Stalisfield in the County of Kent a Spinster* **GRACE and HEALTH. Whereas ye are, as it is alleged, resolved to proceed to the solemnization of true and lawful matrimony and that you greatly desire that the same may be solemnized in the face of the church: We therefore being willing that these your reasonable desires may the more speedily obtain a due effect, and to the end thereof, that this marriage may be publicly and lawfully solemnized in the** *Parish* **Church of** *Stalisfield aforesaid* **by the RECTOR, VICAR, CURATE, or Officiating MINISTER thereof, without the publication or proclamation of the Banns of Matrimony,**

Provided there shall appear no impediment of kindred or alliance, or of any other lawful cause, nor any suit commenced in any Ecclesiastical Court, to bar or hinder the proceeding of the said matrimony according to the tenor of this Licence; And likewise that the celebration of this marriage be had and done publicly in the aforesaid *Parish* Church between the hours of eight and twelve in the forenoon. We, for lawful causes, graciously grant this our Licence and Faculty as well to you the parties contracting, as to the Rector, Vicar, Curate, or Minister of the aforesaid *Church* who is designed to solemnize the marriage between you, in the manner and form above specified, according to the rites of the Book of Common Prayer, set forth for that purpose, by the authority of Parliament. Given under the seal of our Commissary General, this *twentieth* day of *September* in the year of Our Lord one thousands eight hundred and sixty *five* and in the *third* year of our Translation.

W.H. Cullen Registrar

[At side] By Statute 4, Geo. 4, Cap. 76, this Licence to continue in force only three months from the date hereof.

It is also possible to get married in the Church of England with a licence from a Superintendent Registrar as in the example in Chart 46. The Superintendent Registrar's certificate which preceded this marriage is shown in Chart 47.

CHART 45: A Marriage by Special Licence 1923

1923 **Marriage solemnized at** Westminster Abbey **in the** Close **of** St. Peter Westminster **in the County of** Middlesex							
When Married	Name & Surname	Age	Condition	Rank or Profession	Residence	Father's name & surname	Rank or Profession of Father
26th April 1923	Albert Frederick Arthur George Windsor	27 years	Bachelor	Prince of the United Kingdom of Great Britain & Ireland, Duke of York K.G. G.C.V.O. K.I.	Buckingham Palace	George Frederick Ernest Albert Windsor	HM King George V of the United Kingdom of Great Britain & Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond The Seas, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India
	Elizabeth Angela Marguerite Bowes-Lyon	23 years	Spinster	----	17 Bruton Street W1	Claude George Bowes-Lyon	Fourteenth Earl of Strathmore & Kinghorne
Married in Westminster Abbey **according to the Rites & ceremonies of the** Established Church							**by me** Randall Cantuar [i.e. Archbishop of Canterbury]
This marriage was solemnized between us Albert Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon			**In the Presence of us**	George R.V. Mary R, Strathmore & Kinghorne Eliz: Cecilia Strathmore & Kingshorne, Edward P. And 22 other royal & notable persons			

CHART 46:
A Marriage by Superintendent Registrar's Certificate 1884

1884 **Marriage solemnized at** the Parish Church **in the** Parish **of** Christchurch, Hougham **in the** County of Kent								
#	When Married	Name & Surname	Age	Condition	Rank or Profession	Residence	Father's name & surname	Rank or Profession of Father
481	Feb^{y} 10th	Patrick Walsh Alice Maud Fishenden	30 25	Bachelor Spinster	Corporal R.I.R. – – – –	This Parish St. James parish	Richard Walsh George Fishenden	Compositor Labourer
Married in the Parish Church **according to the Rites & ceremonies of the Established Church, By** Superintendent Registrar's Certificate								**by me** H.T. Armfield Rector of Colne, Essex
This marriage was solemnized between us P. Walsh Alice Maude Fishenden				**In the Presence of us** George Kirk J.R. Redman				

CHART 47: The Accompanying Superintendent Registrar's Certificate 1884

SUPERINTENDENT REGISTRAR'S CERTIFICATE FOR MARRIAGE WITHOUT LICENCE
I, *George John Carter*, Superintendent Registrar of the District of *Dover* in the County of *Kent*, do hereby certify, That on the *nineteenth* day of *January* 1884, notice was duly entered in the Marriage Notice Book of the said District of the Marriage intended between the Parties herein-after named and described, and of such Marriage being intended to be solemnized without Licence, delivered under the hand of *Patrick Walsh*, one of the Parties; (that is to say),

Name	Condition	Rank or Profession	Age	Dwelling Place	Length of residence	Church or Building in which Marriage is to be solemnized	District & County in which the Parties respectively dwell
Patrick Walsh	Bachelor	Corporal R.I.R.	30 years	South Front Barracks, Hougham	More than a month	Christ Church	Dover, Kent
Alice Maud Fishenden	Spinster	----	25 years	1 Down Place Turanion Street Dover	More than a month		Dover, Kent

CHART 48: Marriage Certificate of Joseph CHAFFEY & Mary DASHWOOD 1851

Registration District Blandford

1851 **Marriage solemnized at** the Register Office **in the District of** Blandford Union **in the** County of Dorset

#	When Married	Name & Surname	Age	Condition	Rank or Profession	Residence	Father's name & surname	Rank or Profession of Father
	24th April 1851	Joseph CHAFFEY Mary DASHWOOD	Forty years Fifty years	Widower Spinster	Labourer – – – –	Mapperton in the Parish of Almer Mapperton in the parish of Almer	Nathaniel CHAFFEY Robert DASHWOOD	Labourer Woodman

Married in the Register Office **by** – – –

This marriage was solemnized between us Joseph Chaffey X the mark of Mary Dashwood

In the Presence of us Charles Dashwood, Caroline Dashwood

Before James Hobbs Registrar Thos Oakley Superintendent Registrar

Register Office Marriage

The availability of a civil marriage in the Register Office was a boon to many couples, particularly for nonconformists who had no chapel licenced for marriages and for those who did not attend church. Couples of different faiths were more likely to marry in a register office than in the Established Church. The parties still needed to give notice and receive a Superintendent Registrar's Certificate when they had done this. However, because the Superintendents were also Officers of the Poor Law at first, for some people weddings at a Register Office carried the stigma of the Poor Law.

Chart 48 shows an example of a Register Office marriage for an older couple. Note than only rough ages were given; she made her mark, and that both the Registrar and Superintendent Registrar signed. The witnesses were her brother and his wife.

Persons Conducting & Registering the Ceremony

The certificate will be signed by the person who conducts the marriage as well as by the one who registers it. In the Church of England and many other religious weddings this will be the same person so there will be only one signature. For register office weddings there will be two signatures; the Superintendent Registrar who conducted the ceremony and the Registrar who registered it. Catholic and non-conformist marriages before 1898, and afterwards if they had no authorized chapel, will also have two signatures.

Note that since the marriage is conducted by someone authorized by the registrar then the date of marriage is the same as the date of registration and does not have to be separately stated as with births and deaths. Looked at another way, you are not required to go to a certain church or register office to die or to give birth!

Signatures of Parties

The literacy of the parties can generally be seen from the fluency of their signatures. In 1841 33 percent of men and 44 percent of women signed the marriage register with an X. Prior to the Education Acts of 1870 and 1880, which provided for universal elementary schooling, it was also common for the lower classes to perhaps be able to read but not write. Even if they could manage their signature then that may have been all they were ever required to pen. An X [mark] was made by someone who couldn't write at all, but beware of situations where the literate woman made an X if she did not want to appear more learned than her illiterate spouse. Appearances mattered so much to the Victorians.

The original signatures will, of course, only be found on the original entry—the book kept in the church, and probably now deposited in the local archives or county record office. More recently the parties actually signed both books, so the one sent upon completion to the local registrar may also show actual signatures. It is often helpful to confirm identity by using a signature made on a marriage [or other] certificate with that made on another document elsewhere, such as a will or land transaction.

Signatures of Witnesses

Witnesses may be minors as long as they appear to be credible. They are usually of the same age group as the couple, but may be parents (including a remarried mother under a new surname), other relatives, good friends who acted as bridesmaid or best man, any other friends, the churchwarden, or sometimes just someone who happened to be passing the church door at the time.

There must be two witnesses and there may be more, as seen in the example for King George VI, who had 27. There are special books in use for royal weddings with extra large spaces for witnesses.

The Vickers/Dashwood marriage in Chart 49 has three witnesses: Henry Vickers was the groom's brother, Frances Dashwood could be the bride's mother or sister (other signatures are needed to confirm which), and Louisa Barracluff who was the bride's married sister. This certificate did not mention whether the marriage was by banns or licence; many ministers forgot this particular.

CHART 49: Marriage Certificate of Andrew E. VICKERS & Mary ANN DASHWOOD 1846

Registration District Richmond, Surrey
1846 **Marriage solemnized at** the Parish Church
in the Parish of Barnes **in the** County of Surrey

#	When Married	Name & Surname	Age	Condition	Rank or Profession	Residence	Father's name & surname	Rank or Profession of Father
45	Aug 18	Andrew Edward Vickers	Of full age	Bachelor	Printer	Barnes	George Edward Vickers (deceased)	Law Stationer
		Mary Ann Dashwood	Of full age	Spinster	----	Barnes	Joseph Dashwood	Clothes Salesman

Married in the Parish Church **according to the** Rites and ceremonies **of the** Established Church **by me** Benj. Whitelock

This marriage was solemnized between us Andrew Edward Vickers, Mary Ann Dashwood

In the Presence of us Henry Joseph Vickers, Frances Dashwood, Louisa Ann Barracluff

CHART 50:
Consurlar Marriage Certificate of George W. CROWE & Mary L. MARTIN 1901

CERTIFIED COPY of an ENTRY OF MARRIAGE within the District of British Consul at Piraeus
District of British Consul **at** Piraeus
1901 **Marriage solemnized at** the British Consulate - Piraeus

#	When Married	Name & Surname	Age	Condition	Rank or Profession	Residence	Father's name & surname	Rank or Profession of Father
42	5th March 1901	George William Crowe	35	Widower	Merchant	Piraeus	Alfred Louis Crowe	British V. Consul and Merchant
		Mary Louisa Martin	38	Spinster	Lady	Piraeus	Charles Martin	Doctor

Married in the British Consulate Piraeus **according to the Rites & Ceremonies of the Church of England** — **by me** F.R. Elliott Chaplain to His Britannic Majesty's legation at Athens. Reginald Walsh H.B.M.'s Consul

This marriage was solemnized between us	George W. Crowe Mary Louisa Martin	**In the Presence of us**	E.D. Barff F. R. Wood

Additions & Corrections

If there are any additions or corrections these will be noted at the far right of the certificate, outside the box of information. Copies having a line drawn through this space indicate that no additions or corrections had been made to the entry as of the date of issue of that copy.

Affidavit

Under the main section is the affidavit from the person who certified it. With marriages there are at least three types reading as follows:

- Local Supt. Registrar *"Certified to be a true copy of an entry in a register in my custody".*
- GRO: *Certified to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a register of Marriages in the Registration District of (district name) Given at the General Register Office, London, under the Seal of the said Office, the (date).*
- Church*: "I, (name of minister) of (parish) in the County of (name) do hereby certify that this is a true Copy of the Entry No. (number) in the Marriage Register Book of the said (church or chapel). Witness my hand this (date)". (Signed)*

The latter type will often be found in family papers dated on the actual day of the marriage, and familiarly referred to as 'our marriage lines'. It could also have been obtained at a later date from the church by one of the parties. It is useful to note the date when the certificate was obtained.

Did the parties get it on their wedding day, or later during their lifetime? If so, ask yourself why did they need a copy? If a previous researcher obtained it, be cautious—it may not be the correct one! See if all the facts add up.

Overseas Marriage Certificates

As an example, Chart 50 gives a consular marriage in Greece, the groom being the son of the British Vice Consul.

The Regimental marriages are not indexed so application has to be made at the Family Records Centre or to the General Register Office at Southport for a marriage search, for which you need to know the husband's regiment and the approximate date.

Certificate & Parish Register Information

Barring errors in transcription the only difference *should* be the fact that the parish register copy is the original and will have the actual signatures or marks of the parties, witnesses, and minister. A photocopy of this parish register entry, (or Register Office entry in the case of marriages held there), is the only primary evidence. All transcripts are secondary evidence, by definition. A useful side note for those finding a marriage in England but in a church of foreign derivation is to check back with the actual church register, wherever it is now deposited. This may have other notes about the places of origin or families of the bride and groom, as noted by Degen.

ENGLISH & WELSH DEATH CERTIFICATES

There is a considerable amount of information given on death certificates for England & Wales, and it is worth taking the trouble to understand each portion and column of the certificate. These items and their genealogical value are now considered.

Note that even when the informant was a close relative you get what he thought he knew, what the deceased had told him, what he guessed, *or* what he wished others to believe. It is also true that some good friends or neighbours may have had more information than relatives, particularly if the deceased lived alone. Where the informant didn't even guess, then there will be a line drawn through the space for that item.

For the researcher interested in locating living relatives an ancestor's death certificate will give addresses closer to the present time than those given on his birth or marriage certificate. In addition, the informant may be a descendant, and the certificate will greatly assist in finding probate materials which usually list descendants and their addresses at the time probate was taken out. The information on the death certificate will also assist one to locate the many other death-related records given in the section 'Killing them off' which list descendants and their addresses.

Heading: Where Obtained

The source of the certificate gives you clues as to the reliability of the data Is it a:

- Photocopy of original
- Photocopy of a copy (transcript)
- Copy of a copy!

Heading: District/Subdistrict/County

The same applies here as for births. This information may provide clues to the spouse's possible place of death, and to children's places of marriage or residence.

Some people die in the *wrong district*, so don't ignore index entries outside the known area, as in the two following examples. Thomas Brickett (Chart 51) died quite a long way from home in a major London teaching hospital. We get three addresses: where he died, his home, and his son's home.

Christian Charles Dashwood died in the wrong district, because he moved from the Strand in Westminster, Middlesex to live with his eldest daughter in north east London (Chart 52). Now I knew his daughter's married name and address and could search the Leyton census in both 1881 and 1891.

CHART 51:
Death Certificate of Thomas BRICKETT 1905

Registration District Strand 1905 **Death in the Sub-district of** Strand **in the** County of London									
#	When & Where died	Name and Surname	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of Death	Signature, Description & residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
18	9th December 1905 Kings College Hospital	Thomas Brickett	Male	73 years	A Master Market Gardener of 190 Romnay Road West Norwood	Epithelioma of mouth. Operation. Exhaustion. Certified by C.T. Cheatle MRCS	H.A. Brickett Son 163 Romnay Road West Norwood	22nd December 1905	J.F. Pink Registrar

CHART 52:
Death Certificate of Christian CHARLES DASHWOOD 1887

Registration District West Ham 1887 **Death in the Sub-district of** Leyton **in the** County of Essex									
#	When & Where died	Name and Surname	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of Death	Signature, Description & residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
271	28th November 1887 Market Place Leyton U.S.D.	Christian Charles Dashwood	Male	76 years	Retired Clothier	Asthmatic Bronchitis. Exhaustion. Certified by Alfred C. Honeywell LRCS	Louisa Matterface Daughter Present at the death, Market Place Leyton	30th November 1887	J.Miller Registrar

Number

This is the entry number in the death register and can be from 1-500. There were five entries per page and references are to page numbers not entry numbers, thus it is of no use genealogically.

Date of Death

This is the best source for this date and assists in finding the burial date, probate materials, and an obituary, particularly with those having common names.

When the precise date is not known there will be a phrase such as *On or about [date]* or *Dead body found on [date], last seen alive on [date]*. The term *D.O.A. (Dead on arrival at [hospital etc.])* is relatively modern.

Place of Death

In the early years of civil registration often only the name of the village, or parish in a town was given rather than the detailed street address as is found in later registrations. Investigate whether the address was his or a child's home, a hospital or somewhere else. For example, my great grandmother Harriet Ann Gardner died at 37 West Hill, Dartford, Kent which turned out to be West Hill Hospital. *Institutions may be in disguise*! There was a great stigma attached to such places as workhouses, prisons and lunatic asylums. When mental illness was not understood, people with all kinds of conditions were locked up in lunatic asylums, and the social stigma attached to them was very real.

When someone died in one of these institutions the address of the place of death was usually disguised by giving the house name or street address, rather than the institutional name. The good researcher always consults a town directory and map to find out where the addresses were and what kind of a dwelling it was. This could lead to many interesting hospital and other records. For further discussion on this subject consult Cole.

From July 1969 the deceased's usual address is also given on the certificate.

Name of Deceased

The name given here is the one they were known under at the time of death, which may be vastly different—both given name(s) and surname—from that at birth or even marriage. The authenticity of this depends mainly on how well the informant knew the deceased.

For married women, the name and occupation of her husband is given, and whether she is his *wife* or *widow*. From July 1969 a woman's maiden name is also given.

Legitimate children under school age will have their father's name included, and from 1 April 1982 their mother's name as well. Illegitimate children under school leaving age will have only their mother's name.

For unmarried women, their father's name and occupation may be given. For all such names and details, what you see is the best that the informant knew, or wanted to divulge! Unidentified bodies do have death certificates, as in Chart 53. Many more men die unidentified than women, and most are in their 20s to 40s not, as one might think, mostly elderly tramps!

Age, or Date & Place of Death

The age will help deduce the likely year of birth, but is only as good as what the informant knew, or his best guess. So often it was an estimate—so beware of any figures ending in 0 or 5. A survey showed that ages at death peaked sharply at these years because so many were estimates.

Especially in the 19th century there were many people who just didn't know how old they were. They didn't need to know—there was no school to attend, no pension to collect and no 'senior's discounts'! It was probably more important to know *where your place of settlement was* than your age, as this place provided relief if you became destitute. Many ages of elderly persons are over-estimated as well. From July 1969 the exact birth date as well as the place of birth are given—if known to the informant, of course.

Grace Eves (Chart 54) was actually 66 when she died, but her husband was never told she was 17 years older than he was! Note that her husband was *in attendance* which means he wasn't actually present when she died, but qualified as an informant by being her husband.

CHART 53:
Death Certificate of Unknown Male 1888

Registration District London City 1888 **Death in the Sub-district of** All Hallows Barking **in the** County of London									
#	When & Where died	Name and Surname	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of Death	Signature, Description & residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
94	29th October 1888. Found in the River Thames near Trig Lane	Not known	Male	About 40 to 45 years	Not known	Drowning. Found Drowned but how he came into water no evidence shown. In water under 24 hours.	Certificate received From James Langton Coroner for London. Inquest held 1st November 1888.	2nd November 1888	Geo. Tailor Registrar

CHART 54:
Death Certificate of Grace EVES 1916

Registration District Greenwich 1916 **Death in the Sub-district of** Greenwich West **in the** County of London									
#	When & Where died	Name and Surname	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of Death	Signature, Description & residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
283	1st January 1916 Miller Hospital	Grace Eves	Female	60 years	Of 51 Straightsmouth Wife of William Eves A postman	1. Carcinoma of intestine 2. Debility Heart failure Certified by S.G. Papadopoulos M.D.	William Eves Widower of the Deceased In attendance 51 Straightsmouth	1st January 1916	J.E. Watts Registrar

Chart 55 shows a modern portrait format death certificate that includes the date and place of birth as well as the maiden surname.

CHART 55:
Death Certificate of Edith GARDNER 1976

DEATH	**Entry No** *88*
Registration district *Bexley* **Administrative area** *London Borough of Bexley* **Sub-district** *Erith*	
Date and place of death *Fifteenth September 1976* *124 Old Road, Crayford*	
Name and surname *Edith GARDNER*	**Sex** *Female* **Maiden surname of Woman who has married** *Jupp*
Date and place of birth *18th March 1892* *Crayford, Bexley*	
Occupation and usual address *widow of Bert Gardner* *A Silk Block Printer. 124 Old Road, Crayford, Kent*	
Name and address of informant	**Qualification**
Bermard Alfred Gardner	*Son*
Usual address *124 Old Road, Crayford, Kent*	
Cause of death *1a Myocardial infarction* *b Arteriosclerosis* *2 Anemia* *Certified by R.A. Patel MB*	
I certify that the particulars given by me above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief. *B. Gardner* **informant**	
Date of registration *Sixteenth September 1976*	**Signature of registrar** *H.P. Dodd, Registrar*

Occupation

This is useful detail to start putting flesh on the bones of your family history. In the days before universal pensions a man, and single and widowed women would work as long as they could just to sustain themselves and their families. Their occupations may differ from earlier in life, as those in energetic trades slowed down or as economic fluctuations occurred.

If the deceased was a married or widowed woman the name and occupation of her husband will be shown; even for women who had paid employment. At least this enabled her husband's date of death to be estimated more accurately as one then knows whether he has already died by this date.

Single women may have an occupation listed, or the column may be left blank, or be listed as *daughter of [father, his occupation]*.

Legitimate children under the school leaving age current at the time would have their father's occupation entered in the occupation column.

Cause of Death

This detail tells us much about the deceased and may be of great personal interest to descendants. Before 1874 the cause stated may be just the informant's guess. One sees some wonderfully vague causes such as *Teething* for infants, or V*isitation of God* which really only meant that death was sudden and of unknown cause. Perhaps many of these were heart attacks or strokes.

One also comes across some gems using old vocabulary, such as *Run over by a fly*, which didn't mean an insect in those days but a small horse carriage.

How about *Tripped over a piece of orange peel; in bed 3½ days,* or the absolutely classic *Caught his foot in his bed linen, which caused him to fall to the floor, trapping his head as he did so in a chamber utensil, wherein he suffocated.* (Happily, his descendants have indoor plumbing!)

After 1874 a medical certificate was required so the cause will be at least a doctor's guess! This is indicated by the word *certified* after the cause of death. Sometimes one is faced with the word *unknown* as the cause of death. This is likely to have been a lingering malady unidentifiable to the local medical men, or possibly a case of a person being found dead.

The certificate signed by the doctor has four sections for the causes of death:

- 1a The immediate cause
- 1b The cause of 1a
- 1c The cause of 1b
- 2 Conditions present at death but not contributing to it

As an example the cause might read:

- 1a Pneumonia
- 1b Septicaemia
- 1c Compound fracture of femur
- 2 Diabetes

It is perhaps important to recognize that causes can only be ascribed:

- If they have been discovered by science.
- If the doctor concerned has heard about them.
- If the doctor has recognized them.

Thus many death certificates can conceal more than they reveal!

A doctor was also only able to offer an opinion as to the cause of death if he had attended the deceased during their last illness, seen the patient within 14 days before he died, or seen the deceased after death. If none or these applied, and the cause did not appear suspicious, then the term *unknown* may have been used in the situation.

Nowadays the coroner would investigate such circumstances and decide whether a post mortem examination and/or inquest are necessary.

Unnatural, sudden or suspicious deaths, as well as those in prisons or that occurred during operations in hospitals would have warranted the coroner's attention (Charts 60-62). The result of the post mortem and/or the verdict from the inquest, which was by jury until 1926, was included in the cause of death column on the death certificate.

This would be followed by the phrase *Inquest/Post mortem held* and sometimes its date(s) as well. If the wording is *Inquest adjourned* then it means that someone has been charged with the death, and it may or may not give the name of the accused, or may say *by person or persons unknown*. Depending on the nature of the demise there could be considerable coverage in the local and/or national newspapers.

There are several sources for the interpretation of medical terminology of cause of death, both on the net and in any good medical dictionary in your public library.

Example of Loss of Young Children

Chart 56 gives deaths for three children in one family in one week. Note that there were only two other entries in the midst of these three deaths so they would appear on the same page or adjacent pages in the index. The Superintendent Registrar added her comment, '*What a sad little batch of death certificates.*'

Examples of Deaths in Epidemics

Your ancestors probably lost family members from epidemic diseases, such as bubonic plague in early times, the various 19th century visitations of cholera (1831-2, 1848-9, 1853-4, and 1866), or the 20th century influenza epidemics. If you choose not to get the death certificates then you are not able to integrate your family within the social and economic history of the era and locality.

My 2nd great grandmother Sophia Thom née Bissett died on her 37th birthday from cholera (Chart 57). She left several young children including Francis, aged four months, who survived to become my great grandfather. One can only imagine the unsanitary conditions without piped water in the Rotherhithe dock area during this time; only the tough survived! These kind of events really bring history alive.

My great aunt, known as *Edie* (the nickname for her second given name), died in the flu epidemic just after the First World War (Chart 58). The only free medical assistance in those days was at the Infirmary attached to the Union Workhouse, and her death was certified by the medical officer there. Unusually, the informant was the lady's father who didn't seem to have known what his son-in-law did for a living! Samuel Batey was in the Royal Navy and presumably away. The family story is that he emigrated to Canada shortly afterwards; if anyone knows his subsequent history I would be most interested in comparing notes.

Example of Infant Living Only a Few Hours

Infant mortality was still high well into the 20th century. Most families seem to have had a few infant deaths, so if you have a three- or four-year gap between known siblings it's worth searching out the infant deaths. In Chart 59 the doctor certifying the death has the letters B.C. after his name, rather than the commoner M.D. This is probably the same as Ch. B. (Chirurgiae Baccalaureus = Bachelor of Surgery.)

CHART 56: Death Certificates of Three Young Lyons Children 1903

Registration District Clutton
1903 **Death in the Sub-district of** Harptree **in the** County of Somerset

#	When & Where died	Name and Surname	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of Death	Signature, Description & residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
388	6th July 1903 Hinton Blewett R.D.	Edith LYONS	Female	7 years	Daughter of Andrew Lyons A farmer	Diptheria 6 days Certified by Theodore Martin MRCS	A. Lyons, father Present at the death Hinton Blewett	6th July 1903	Enoch Salmon Registrar
391	10th July 1903 Hinton Blewett R.D.	Edgar LYONS	Male	5 years	Son of Andrew Lyons A farmer	Septic pneumonia 2 days Certified by Theodore Martin MRCS	A. Lyons, father Present at the death Hinton Blewett	11th July 1903	Enoch Salmon Registrar
392	10th July 1903 Hinton Blewett R.D.	Amy LYONS	Female	11 years	Daughter of Andrew Lyons A farmer	Septic pneumonia 36 hours Certified by Theodore Martin MRCS	A. Lyons, father Present at the death Hinton Blewett	11th July 1903	Enoch Salmon Registrar

CHART 57:
Death Certificate of Sophia THOM 1849

Registration District Rotherhithe 1849 **Death in the Sub-district of** Rotherhithe **in the** County of Surrey									
#	When & Where died	Name and Surname	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of Death	Signature, Description & residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
59	17th August 1849 Jennings Cottages Rotherhithe	Sophia Thom	Female	37 years	Wife of Francis Thom Mast maker	Cholera Certified	Fra[s] Thom Present at the death Jennings Cottages Rotherhithe	18th August 1849	Geo Roth Registrar

CHART 58:
Death Certificate of Winifred E.M. BATEY 1918

Registration District Greenwich
1918 **Death in the Sub-district of** Grenwich East **in the** County of London

#	When & Where died	Name and Surname	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of Death	Signature, Description & residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
113	26 October 1918 Union Infirmary	Winifred Edith Maria Batey	Female	26 years	Of 85 Sutton St., Greenwich Wife of Samuel Batey Occupation Unknown	(i) Influenza (ii) Pneumonia Certified by W.D. Wiggins MRCS	William Eves Father 51 Straightsmouth Greenwich	28 October 1918	P.C. Wates Registrar

CHART 59:
Death Certificate of Violet IVY THOM 1912

Registration District Greenwich 1912 **Death in the Sub-district of** Greenwich East **in the** County of London									
#	When & Where died	Name and Surname	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of Death	Signature, Description & residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
306	3rd November 1912 Union Infirmary	Violet Ivy Thom	Female	9 hours	Daughter of John Thom, a Laborer of 4 Florence Street Deptford	(i) Prematurity Certified by H.N. Little B.C.	W.D. Wiggins Medical officer Union Infirmary	12th November 1912	P.C. Wates Registrar

CHART 60:
Death Certificate of Chester TEE JUPP 1931

Registration District Dover 1931 **Death in the Sub-district of** Dover **in the** County of Kent									
#	When & Where died	Name and Surname	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of Death	Signature, Description & residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
	[20th crossed out] (21) 29th April 1931 on road at East Cliff Dover UD	Chester Tee Jupp	Male	7 years	Of 30 East Cliff Dover Child of Arthur Jupp, Fitter, Dover Harbour Board	Fracture of skull caused in consequence of having been knocked down by a motor lorry. Misadventure. No P.M.	Certificate received From Ernest E. Pain Deputy Coroner For Dover. Inquest held 30th April 1931	First May 1931	S. Beeching Registrar

CHART 61:
Death Certificate of Michael HAMMANT 1842

Registration District Dartford 1842 **Death in the Sub-district of** Bexley **in the** County of Kent									
#	When & Where died	Name and Surname	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of Death	Signature, Description & residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
225	6th of May 1842 Crayford	Michael Hammond	male	41 years	Block printer	Self destruction by Hanging himself While Temporarily Deranged caused by Excessive drinking	Chaˢ Jⁿ Cartter Coroner for Kent Greenwich	20th May 1842	Samuel Levens Registrar

CHART 62:
Death Certificate of Samuel BRICKETT 1854

Registration District Barnet 1854 **Death in the Sub-district of** Barnet **in the** Counties of Hertford & Middlesex									
#	When & Where died	Name and Surname	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of Death	Signature, Description & residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
201	24th December 1854	Samuel Brickett	Male	59	Agricultural Labourer	Cut his throat With a razor Being then of Unsound mind.	R. Grove Lowe Coroner St. Albans	30th December 1854	William Cutbush Registrar

CHART 63:
Death Certificate of William CHOWINS 1872

Registration District Okehampton 1872 **Death in the Sub-district of** Hatherleigh **in the** County of Devon									
#	When & Where died	Name and Surname	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of Death	Signature, Description & residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
335	16th July 1872 Sand Park Jacobstowe	William Chowins	Male	75 years	Mason	Apoplexy Certified	Ann Kelly Present at the death Sand Park Jacobstowe	18th July 1872	James Hooper Registrar

CHART 64:
Death Certificate of Mary CHOWINS 1885

Registration District Okehampton 1872 **Death in the Sub-district of** Hatherleigh **in the** County of Devon									
#	When & Where died	Name and Surname	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of Death	Signature, Description & residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
72	10th March 1885 Coombe Jacobstowe R.S.D.	Mary Chowins	Female	80 years	Widow of William Chowins Mason	Serious Apoplexy 7 days Certified by John Gould MRCS	Ann Fullbrook Daughter Present at the death Odiham Hampshire	11th March 1885	James Hooper Registrar

If I had only found this certificate I might have assumed that the informant was William's daughter Ann, and gone on a wild goose chase looking for her marriage to a Mr. Kelly. The certificate of Mary, William's widow tells the true story; their daughter married a Mr. Fullbrook. The marriage was found quickly on the IGI in 1858 in Clapham, Surrey and the parish register entry found to confirm it, thus ruling out the possibility of two marriages for the same girl.

If the cause of death was later revised, and there are notable examples of bodies being exhumed and coroners making fresh diagnoses, particularly in cases of murder (Feather), then a new certificate was issued. The old registration on the books was annotated and normally any subsequent certificate would be issued from the re-registration. An interested party could also obtain one from the first registration. However, previously issued certificates were not recovered and revised (Trembath).

Fatal Conditions

Some can be more serious than others! Consider the causes of death of William and Mary Chowins (Charts 63 and 64). Whilst William only died of *Apoplexy* his wife was diagnosed with *Serious Apoplexy!*

For the suicide of Samuel Brickett, (Chart 62), I was fortunate in obtaining a newspaper report from the British Museum Newspaper Library at Colindale.

The *Hertford Mercury* of Saturday 20th December 1854 reported: *On the 26th inst. an inquest was held at Cockfosters by D. Brabant esq. Deputy Coroner, on view of the body of Samuel Brickett, an elderly man, and a native of that place, who died on the 24th inst. in consequence of having cut his throat on the previous day. The jury returned a verdict of 'Temporary Insanity' and no motive for the deed can be discovered.*

Example of Accident Involving an Inquest

In the case of a sudden or unusual death a coroner's inquest would have been held, and either the word *coroner* or *inquest* would appear in the informant's column. It is highly likely that the local newspaper would carry a report, and the researcher should consult Gibson & Rogers on how to obtain the coroner's records.

The verdict at the inquest, see Chart 60, was *Misadventure* and the phrase *No P.M.* indicates that the coroner did not require a post-mortem examination.

Examples of Suicides

In Chart 61 the man's name was actually Hammant, but the information wasn't given by a Crayford inhabitant who would have known this family. When the coroner is the informant, it always pays to look for his records (which, however, don't always survive) and newspaper accounts that often give a much fuller story. So far, neither have been found for this intriguing entry.

Informant's Signature, Address & Relationship (if any)

In 1837 there was a specific list of *qualified informants*, just as there was for births:

- One present at the death, that is when the deceased actually expired.
- One in attendance, that is one who knew the deceased was ill and looked after them but was not present at the moment of death.
- The occupier, (usually interpreted as the owner), of the house.
- The proprietor of the institution, such as a master of a workhouse.

After 1875 further qualifications were added:

- The person who found the body.
- Any inmate of the dwelling.
- The person who arranged for the burial. The term used is actually *caused the burial* but it doesn't mean a funeral director or sexton.
- The person in charge of the body.

Note that you couldn't be the informant simply because you were related, or because you were the executor of the estate, unless you qualified in one of the above categories. That said, the informant was often a relative, although the relationship to the deceased was not usually given on the very early death certificates. Spinster daughters often cared for elderly parents and this may be the first glimpse of them in a record since birth or christening.

Perhaps it was a married daughter giving her married surname and address, which could be used when looking for her marriage or the previous and subsequent census. If it was a son with a different surname this could indicate:

- That a deceased woman had had a previous marriage, or an illegitimate child.
- That a deceased man had married a woman who had already had a child by a previous marriage or liaison.

Victorians used the terms brother and sister to mean both those related by blood and marriage. The term *in-law* had a broader meaning in the 19th century than it does today. Anyone who was, *in the eyes of the law my child,* could be called an *-in-law.* This particularly applied to step children (*son-in-law* or *daughter-in-law)* who could often be an informant to the death of a stepfather *(father-in-law)* or stepmother *(mother-in-law).*

If the informant is the coroner, or there is mention of an inquest, then newspaper accounts and possibly coroners' records will give further details, often at length and in grisly detail, as the Victorians delighted in such amusements!

The informant's literacy can be gauged by the fluency of the signature, found on an original, of course, and the signature could prove or disprove identity with another person of the same name.

Joseph Dashwood (Chart 65) died of consumption, (also known as TB, tuberculosis, pulmonary consumption or phthisis). The informant was his younger brother at whose home he died, and who was qualified to act as informant by being *present at the death*, meaning that he was there when he died. The other term seen is *in attendance* which means that this person knew the deceased had been ill, perhaps was looking after him, perhaps the doctor, but who was not actually there at the precise time of death (Chart 54). However, there are examples where the registrar has interpreted it to mean *in attendance at the register office!*

CHART 65:
Death Certificate of Joseph EDWARD DASHWOOD 1863

Registration District Strand 1863 **Death in the Sub-district of** St. Mary le Strand **in the** County of Middlesex									
#	When & Where died	Name and Surname	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of Death	Signature, Description & residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
24	24 September 1863 1 Holywell Street Strand	Joseph Edward Dashwood	Male	59 years	Artist (Painter)	Consumption 9 months Certified	C.C. Dashwood Present at the death 1 Holywell Street Strand	28 September 1863	S.R. Lovell Registrar

CHART 66:
Death Certificate of Maria EVES 1880

Registration District Kingston on Thames 1880 **Death in the Sub-district of** Kingston **in the** County of Surrey									
#	When & Where died	Name and Surname	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of Death	Signature, Description & residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
58	9th October 1880 21 Cleaveland Rd Surbiton Kingston	Maria Eves	Female	41 years	Wife of John Eves A gardener	Cancer of the Liver Certified by Owen Coleman M.D.	Mary Ann Pusey Sister Present at the death 4 Elizabeth Place Pearson Street Kingsland	11th October 1880	John Harris Registrar

CHART 67:
Death Certificate of Frederick CHARLES GREEN 1915

CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF DEATH Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages (Special Provisions) Act 1957 Return of Warrant officers, Non-Commissioned Officers and Men of *The King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry* Killed in Action or who have died whilst on Service Abroad in the War of 1914-1921							
Regimental No.	Rank	Name in Full (Surname First)	Age	Country of Birth	Date of Birth	Place of Death	Cause of Death
2011	L/Cpl 1st	GREEN, Fredk. Charles	38	England	2.2.1915	France	Killed in Action
An Entry relating to the death of Fredk. Charles Green							

CHART 68:
Death Certificate of John NORRIE 1880

CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF DEATH **Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages (Special Provisions) Act 1957** An Entry in an Army Register Book of Birth, Deaths and Marriages 1879-80 Half-Yearly Returns of Burials in the Garrison of Gibraltar in the Presbyterian Church. Date December 1880				
Name	Abode	When Buried	Age	By whom the ceremony was performed
John W. Norrie, infant son of Sergeant Norrie, 93rd Highlanders	Buena Vista	12th July 1880	Infant	J. Ross
Certified to be a true copy of the certified copy of an entry made in a Service Department register.				

Chart 66 is a nice uncomplicated certificate with much information, including the place of death, (although it does not say that this is her home address) and, highly significantly for the next census in less than six months, the married name and address of Maria's sister Mary Ann. The home addresses of the deceased and the informant are useful for accessing censuses up to 1901, as well as electoral rolls (voters lists) after this when most people had the franchise.

When Registered

This date may be the same as the date of death or up to five days afterwards, unless the body wasn't found for some time, of course. When a coroner's post mortem was held it should be within 14 days of the death, and if an inquest was necessary then there was no time limit. Where the delay was over one year then the Registrar General became involved and the fact was noted in this column. The actual date of registration naturally determined in which index quarter the death would appear. Thus, if you don't find an entry in the *right* quarter it is possible that there was an inquest, so keep looking.

Signature of Registrar

The sub-district registrar signed here, together with the local Superintendent Registrar *if* the registration date was more than one year after the death date

Overseas Death Certificates

Two examples of Overseas Deaths follow in Chart 67, which shows a typical World War I death, and Chart 68 from a Regimental Register.

Killing Them Off

One of the biggest mistakes, which quickly identifies a poor researcher, is to ignore the deaths. There are probably more records concerning a person's demise than for any other event in their lives. Always follow documentation through to the end, getting as many of the following as are relevant in each case:

- ✓ Burial entry in churchyard, dissenters burial ground, or cemetery
- ✓ Coroner's report
- ✓ Cremation record (from 1884)
- ✓ Death certificate (civil registration)
- ✓ Doctor's certificate
- ✓ Friendly Society records
- ✓ Funeral Home or undertakers' records
- ✓ Funeral service entry
- ✓ Grave register entry which tells who owns the grave and who all is buried therein
- ✓ Gravestone Inscription
- ✓ Hospital Records
- ✓ Inquest records
- ✓ Lengthier obituaries or articles in religious, trade, hobby or other association journals
- ✓ Memorial cards
- ✓ Monumental mason's record

- ✓ Newspaper accounts of funerals, which can be full of genealogical details
- ✓ Newspaper reports of unusual deaths, accidents, inquests etc.
- ✓ Obituary—there may be more than one
- ✓ Order for cremation
- ✓ Probate documents, such as a will, administration, guardianship, inventory or litigation concerning the estate
- ✓ Professional Association records
- ✓ Trade Union records
- ✓ Workhouse records

There will be so many clues and surprises, for example:

- Previously unsuspected second marriages can be found. When you can't find a death for a woman up to age 100, or can't find a death in the index under the first married name for a known death date, then consider remarriage. The incidence of 2nd and 3rd marriages was very high.

- The existence of more children can be established by their appearing in a will or administration, or as the informant on a death certificate, along with their relationship and address.

- The place of death may be a child's residence and will lead to further sources such as electoral rolls, pictures of the residence and censuses.

- If the death occurred in a hospital or in the workhouse there may be further records compiled by those institutions that can be pursued.

- An inquest or coroner's report may be noted which could lead to substantial reports in newspapers of the deceased's life, family and associates.

- The deceased may have changed occupation later in life, and this could lead to other records for him.

- The certificate may prove to be the wrong person and you'll have to revise your theory. You will then be closer to the truth.

Comparison of Death & Burial Information

The death certificate usually gives more details than a Church of England burial, as shown in Charts 69 and 70 for Elizabeth Jupp. There are always surprises in burial entries, and you may get a wonderful gem like *He fought at Waterloo* or *Grandmother of Isaac Webb the blacksmith*. Some cemetery records are very detailed and may include information about who paid for the burial and their address and relationship.

CHART 69:
Death Certificate of Elizabeth JUPP 1863

Registration District of Cuckfield 1863 **Death in the Sub-district of** Hurstpierpoint **in the** County of Sussex									
#	When & Where died	Name and Surname	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of Death	Signature, Description & residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
297	24th June 1863 Hatches, Hurstpierpoint	Elizabeth Jupp	Female	88 years	Widow of John Jupp An agricultural Labourer	Natural Decay Certified	X the mark of Sarah Still present at the death Hatches, Hurstpierpoint	26th June 1863	Samuel White Registrar

CHART 70:
Parish Register Burial Entry of Elizabeth JUPP 1863

BURIALS in the Parish of Hurstpierpoint of Burials **in the County of** Sussex **in the Year** 1863.				
Name	Abode	When Buried	Age	By whom the ceremony was performed
Elizabeth Jupp	Hurstpierpoint	28 June	88	Carey H. Borrer Rector

Welsh Certificates

Until 1963 all certificates were issued solely in English. Since that year a bilingual variety is issued for events occurring in Wales. All the headings are in both languages, but the information is still in English since that was the language used at the time. Modern events may have information supplied in Welsh and thus certificates could be provided in Welsh.

Lundy Island Births

Birth registers for Lundy Island will be found under RG 32 – RG 35 at the Public Record Office.

Isle of Man Certificates

These contain the same information as English ones, but as many of the registrations are available on film they can be obtained much more cheaply, and are reliable primary evidence.

Channel Islands Certificates

Some Channel Islands events were treated as foreign ones and will be found in the Public Record Office.

Guernsey

Births have the same information as England & Wales but deaths also have names of parents, (including maiden surname of mother), and may have the date of burial. As many of the registrations are available on film they can be obtained much more cheaply, and are reliable primary evidence.

If the person you are seeking is not on the Guernsey death indexes you should enquire at the local police station as they are the keepers of the old cemetery records and can usually be counted on to 'find their man!' There was a fee for registration and many poor people could not afford to have their relatives' names added to the official death registers, but they would have had to be buried somewhere locally.

RELIABILITY OF INFORMATION

Have You Got the Right Certificate?

Certificates passed down in the family are likely to be correct, especially if they were made on the day of the event for taking home. When you are finding the three pieces of proof for each linkage this is when you will discover possible problems with incorrectly identified certificates.

Requesting Wrong Certificate

Were you thorough enough with indexes or just stopped at the first likely one? Perhaps your one is not on the index, or is so badly mangled that it is unfindable in the present system. You may have sent for the best candidate you could find at the time. With the insight gained from reading this book you will be able to re-assess the situation and make a better search now.

Sent Wrong Certificate

When I applied at St. Catherine's House for a copy of the 1839 September quarter death certificate of my ancestor Francis Richardson I quoted the Volume and Page Number. (VII-192) I received a certificate for *Infant Richardson* which was located on the same page in their records, as I later confirmed from the index. I had to wait in line to see the supervisor and several days later I received the correct certificate after wasting about an hour of my valuable time in England. These errors occur because staff are not thorough enough. Send them back immediately and complain politely but firmly! It must happen frequently in Wales!

Errors on Certificates

These occur with great frequency and can be derived from various sources:

- Incorrect information given deliberately or inadvertently to the registrar.
- Incorrectly recorded by the registrar.
- Copying errors when a registrar's copy was made or when the certificate was created.

A survey by Goulty found that an incredible 1 in 40 certificates contained at least one error. And that was only the ones he knew about! Some certificates contain several errors, for example the two transcribed copies of the marriage of my ancestors Henry Dartnell and Susan Brown contain some of each of the above kinds of mistakes. There are two items of incorrect information, and four differences between these two certified, transcribed copies in Chart 71. Which certificate will you believe?

CHART 71:
Two Different Marriage Certificates of Henry DARTNELL & Susan BROWN 1851

Registration District Dartford
1851 **Marriage solemnized at** Crayford **in the**
Parish of Crayford **in the** County of Kent

#	When Married	Name & Surname	Age	Condition	Rank or Profession	Residence	Father's name & surname	Rank or Profession of Father
105	September 7th	Henry Dartnell	Of full age	Widower	Labourer	Crayford	Henry Dartnell	Labourer
		Susan Brown	Of full age	Spinster	– – – –	Crayford	Robert Brown	Labourer

Married in the Parish Church **according to the** Rites & Ceremonies **of the** Church of England after banns **by me** Samuel Bath

This marriage was solemnized between us	Henry Dartnell Susan Brown	**In the Presence of us**	Elizabeth Webb William Newman

Registration District Dartford
1851 **Marriage solemnized at** Crayford **in the**
Parish of Crayford **in the** County of Kent

#	When Married	Name & Surname	Age	Condition	Rank or Profession	Residence	Father's name & surname	Rank or Profession of Father
105	September 7th	Henry Dartnell Susan Brown	Of full age Of full age	Widower Spinster	Labourer – – – –	Crayford Crayford	Henry Dartnell Robert Brown	Labourer Labourer

Married in the Parish Church **according to the** Rites & Ceremonies **of the** Church of England after banns **by me** Samuel Holt

This marriage was solemnized between us Henry Dartnell his mark X, Susan Brown

In the Presence of us Elizabeth Webb her mark X, William Newnam

First: the differences—the transcriber of the second copy has noted that Henry makes his mark, and that the second witness has an unusually spelled surname, Newnam not Newman. There is a family by this name in Crayford. I would therefore trust the rendition of the vicar's name as Holt rather than Bath. The fourth difference is inconsequential, being the placement of the X for the first witness. The parish register now has to be accessed to provide the deciding authority, as it is the only primary evidence.

A second problem with this marriage entry is the fact that Henry was the illegitimate son of Tryphena Dartnell and William Allingham. His father was not Henry Dartnell as he told the vicar. Did he not know? Or was he trying to save face? His mother married William Bawcutt when he was two years old, so he was the only father he ever knew.

The third problem is the fact that Henry was a bachelor living in Crayford in the 1851 census taken only four months before this marriage. Despite doing the One-Name Study for this family, I have not found another marriage for him nor a death of a first wife. Why, then, is he listed as a widower here? It would seem to be an error made by the vicar or his clerk at the time of writing up the parish register entry.

Incorrect Information Given to Registrar

Do not think it beyond the realm of possibility that for reasons best known to themselves your ancestors may have been less than forthcoming with the *whole truth and nothing but the truth*. Our ancestors were human and one has to make allowances for imperfection, thus a certain amount of scepticism is a useful corollary to a genealogical investigation.

Consider the situation of Violet Woodward and her first husband as shown in Chart 72. Violet was born on 17 September 1889 thus she was 19 at her marriage in February 1909 not 21 as she stated. Her husband, Dashwood John Thom, was born 15 January 1889 so he was 20 but claimed 23! Both fathers are correctly named and Charles Hastings Woodward died in 1903 so was correctly noted as deceased by 1909. It seems that the couple wished to get married quickly and without parental approval; certainly neither witness is a known relative.

They had two children, a boy and then a girl who died aged only 9 hours. The couple separated about 1913, they couldn't afford a divorce and both took second partners, but in different ways. Dashwood took his son with him and entered a common-law relationship, whilst Violet committed bigamy. Chart 73 shows how she described herself and her father to her new husband, and the minister who married them. Violet is here a spinster and aged 26, although she had celebrated her 27th birthday two weeks previously.

Note how she creatively adjusted her father's name to reflect her second spinsterhood! She changed as little as possible, only the surname, retaining his first two names and his occupation, but this man is naturally unfindable as he didn't exist. I'm certain they weren't the only people who carried out such a subterfuge to get around the current laws. Consider such a situation when next you are confronted with an unfindable father.

The second example concerns Edith Jupp's father, when incorrect information seems to have been given inadvertently to the vicar on the wedding day, as can be seen in Chart 74. The 1914 marriage certificate lists her father as James Alfred Jupp but her daughter told me that Edith had said, "They got my brother and my father mixed up on my wedding lines". Edith had a favourite brother Alfred who was killed in WWI. The first witness on Edith's marriage certificate was Albert James Jupp who was her father. There was obviously a mix-up in the vestry and nobody thought to check the vicar's entry at the time!

CHART 72:
First Marriage Certificate of Violet L.H. WOODWARD to DASHWOOD J. Thom 1909

1909 **Marriage solemnized at** the Wesleyan Church, Manor Street **in the District of** Chelsea **in the County of** London								
#	When Married	Name & Surname	Age	Condition	Rank or Profession	Residence	Father's name & surname	Rank or Profession of Father
162	14th February 1909	Dashwood John Thom Violet Lilla Hetty Woodward	23 years 21 years	Bachelor Spinster	Grocer's Assistant Dressmaker's Assistant	18 Caroline Place, Chelsea 14 Hasker Street Chelsea	Frank Thom Charles Hastings Woodward (deceased)	House painter (journeyman) Coffee House keeper
Married in the Wesleyan Church **according to the Rites & Ceremonies of the** Wesleyan Methodists **by** certificate								**by me** Charles Dawe Minister A.E. Follit Registrar
This marriage was solemnized between us D.J. Thom V.L.H. Woodward				**In the Presence of us** Louisa J. Billington James Riley				

CHART 73:
Second Marriage Certificate of Violet L.H. THOM to James D.W. SOUTH 1916

1916 **Marriage solemnized at** St. James, Hampstead Road
in the Parish of St. Pancras **in the County of** London

#	When Married	Name & Surname	Age	Condition	Rank or Profession	Residence	Father's name & surname	Rank or Profession of Father
276	Sept 30 1916	James Duncan Watson South	32	Widower	Packer	23 Robert Street	George Watson South	Builder
		Violet Lilla Hetty Thom	26	Spinster	----	24 Robert Street	Charles Hastings Thom (dec'd)	Coffee House Keeper

Married in the Parish Church **according to the Rites & Ceremonies of the** Established Church **after** banns **by me** B.W.B. Mathews

This marriage was solemnized between us James Duncan Watson South; Violet Lilla Hetty Thom

In the Presence of us R.W. South; E. Bryden

CHART 74: Marriage Certificate of Bert GARDNER & Edith JUPP 1914

Registration District Dartford
1914 **Marriage solemnized at** St. Paulinus Church **in the**
Parish of Crayford **in the** County of Kent

#	When Married	Name & Surname	Age	Condition	Rank or Profession	Residence	Father's name & surname	Rank or Profession of Father
13	July 11th 1914	Bert Gardner	22	Widower	Silk Printer	2 Westeria Cottages London Road Crayford	Thomas William Gardner	Silk Printer
		Edith Jupp	22	Spinster	----	37 London Road Crayford	James Alfred Jupp	Labourer

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites & Ceremonies of the Church of England after banns **by me** William Butler Lord

This marriage Bert Gardner **was solemnized** Edith Jupp **between us**

In the Presence of us Albert James Jupp, Frances Gardner

Another kind of example to note is that birth certificates record the legal father not necessarily the biological father.

Beware of the common practice of ***magnifying the occupational status***, particularly on marriage and death certificates. The father may describe himself on the census as *hawker of tea* whereas his daughter on her marriage certificate dubs him a *tea merchant*. The groom may try to impress his future in-laws by stating that he is a *postmaster* when in reality he is just a *letter-carrier*. Try to get several different items showing the occupation to make a better assessment. Nevertheless it is usual to see progress in a career throughout life, and it was common for a person to hold more than one job to make ends meet, or to change jobs as well.

Incorrectly Recorded by Registrar

In so many cases spellings could not be checked because of the illiteracy of the informant. The Dardnell/Dartnell example in Chart 24 shows this clearly. When the death certificates for John Stenning (1847) and his wife Jemima Steyning [sic] (1844) were purchased, it was found that the same registrar had spelled the surname in two ways. This was despite the fact that as town blacksmith he was probably one of the best-known men in the community and had a sign board in front of his smithy! The fact that the common informant was illiterate did not help.

Errors made in the content of the original registration entry, and any of the subsequent copying and indexing processes, can be corrected but it is an extremely complex process at which most people throw up their hands. But it can be done, and a correction is supposed to be made to the indexes—but there is no guarantee that this always occurs. The General Register Office claims that they make 200-300 corrections every week to the indexes, but, of course, this only applies to those kept at the office at Southport and in London and any *subsequent* filmings, not presently available copies.

When an error is corrected in a register any certificate issued from it could show these corrections. Chart 75 shows what seems to be a surname error made at the time of filling out the original registration, where the name *Young* has been used instead of *Jupp*. The registrar has to number his error corrections in his book, to guard against later fraud, and these numbered corrections are reproduced faithfully (or otherwise) in the issued certificate. Another example is shown in Chart 60 when the date was changed from 20th to 29th and the error number 21 inserted in brackets.

In this category should be included the three documented instances of fraudulent registration perpetrated by registrars for financial gain. Registrars were paid on the numbers of events they registered, so, for some there was temptation to manufacture entries. The districts involved were Liverpool (Great Howard Street sub-district), South Shields (South Shields sub-district), and St. Marylebone, London (All Souls sub-district).

During the 1840s there were significant numbers of fraudulent extra births, (perhaps as many as one third of the entries!), entered in these sub-districts, as well as extra deaths in South Shields.

These false entries could lead some genealogists astray, but are unlikely to bother the thorough researcher who ensures that they find three pieces of evidence for every linkage.

Error Corrected Later

Chart 76 shows an entry of death where the first name Lucy was likely misheard by the registrar, and noted as Louisa. The witnesses, who had presumably brought the error to the notice of the registrar the next day, were her daughter and son-in-law. The note is appended to the right of the actual certificate, but I have put it underneath here for convenience.

CHART 75:
Birth Certificate of Edith JUPP 1892 showing Error Correction

CERTIFIED COPY of an ENTRY OF BIRTH

Superintendent Registrar's District Dartford

Registrar's Sub-district of Bexley **in the** County of Kent

#	When & Where born	Name, if any	Sex	Name & surname of Father	Name, surname & Maiden surname of Mother	Occupation of Father	Signature, Description & residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar	Name entered after registration
251	18 March 1892 The Grove High Street Crayford RSD	Edith	Girl	Albert Jupp 13 [Young crossed out]	Emma [Young Crossed out] 14 Jupp formerly Dartnell	Machine Printer	Emma Jupp Mother, The Grove High Street Crayford	22 April 1892	FWF Ranger Registrar	----

CHART 76:
Death Certificate of Lucy DASHWOOD 1849 showing Error Correction

Registration District Westminster
1849 **Death in the Sub-district of** St. Margaret, Westminster **in the** County of Middlesex

#	When & Where died	Name and Surname	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of Death	Signature, Description & residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
50	16th September 1849 Sick House York Street	Louisa* Dashwood	Female	57 years	Widow of – – Dashwood tailor	Diarrhoea 3 days Cholera 7 days Peritonitis 6 days Certified	Ann Mars Present at the death Sick House, York Street Westminster	17th September 1849	William Erma Needham Registrar

In No. 50 column 2 for *Louisa* substitute *Lucy* corrected on the 17th Sept. 1849 by me, William Erme Needham registrar in the presence of Sophia Turner, D. Turner both in attendance.

Transcription Errors on Certificates

- In one case Bass was written as BAFS on the transcript because the clerk was insufficiently trained to recognize the old double lower-case **ss** which looks like **fs**.
- Unusual or sloppy writing causes hand written letters or groups of letters to be misread, such as Thom as Thorn, or the Lawyer transcribed as a Sawyer, an example used in *Let's Get Organized.*
- It seems hard to imagine but one sees reported in the genealogical press some outstanding occurrences of bureaucratic bungling in transcription. I have seen examples of up to 12 differences between two supposedly *certified exact copies* of the same registration. Is there a more compelling argument for letting the applicant have a photocopy of the original? With our personal knowledge of the family we are likely to be able to make more sense of even the worst handwriting.

If you receive a certificate with an error on it due to faulty modern transcription such as the examples above, then send it back, (after making a photocopy for your own amusement and edification). A second, correct certificate will be issued at no extra charge.

The national indexes are made from transcribed *copies* of the books of certificates sent up to London by the local Superintendent Registrars. As such, they are bound to contain transcription errors. *From the GRO* you receive a typed or written transcribed copy of the transcribed copy, *or* a photocopy of the transcribed copy. You can ask for the photocopy as it is preferable to the other two. The national record system, then, is far less accurate and complete than the sum of those in the local offices.

Certificates emanating *from the local offices* are more reliable as they are transcribed from the original entries. However, they are mainly typed, or written transcriptions since they usually don't have the special photocopying equipment required. You can ask for a photocopy of the original and, generally speaking, I have found Superintendent Registrars to be very helpful in this respect. This is especially relevant for register office marriage entries where one needs to see the actual signatures of the parties and/or witnesses, and there is no recourse to a parish register.

For marriages, if you do know the parish it is more desirable to get a photocopy of the *original parish register* because it will be far cheaper (photocopying cost only), and will contain the original signatures. This can be done from microfilm through the Family History Centers of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or through the County Record Offices.

Is Civil Registration Primary Evidence?

It is certainly an original source, but not often primary evidence in England & Wales at present. So much depends on where you get your certificate! It can be seen from Chart 77 that only when you can view the original, or a microfilm or photocopy of it, can the certificate be termed primary evidence.

There is presently a campaign to change the situation regarding accessibility to the originals in England & Wales amongst family historians concerned about the quality of source material. It has to be noted that these records, even those (army) certificates going back to 1761, are not yet considered historic!

CHART 77:
Evaluation of English Civil Registration as Primary Evidence

LDS = Latter-day Saints
FHC = Family History Centre
RG = Registrar General in London, postal address in Southport
Ts = Transcript

Location of Original Source	Certificates & Copies Available	Primary Evidence?
Birth, Death, & Civil Marriages Local Registrar has original, but usually no facility for making photocopies of this on certificates.	1. Transcript to RG ------> Transcript on Certificate. 2. Transcript to RG ------> Photocopy on Certificate. 3. Transcript on Certificate. 4. Can ask for separate photocopy.	No No No Yes
Church Marriages Church has original, then passed to Archives, then LDS microfilms	1. Vicar writes a transcript. 2. Ts to Local Registrar ----> Ts on certificate. 3. Ts to Local Registrar ----> Separate photocopy. 4. Ts to Local Registrar ---> Ts to RG ---> Ts on Certificate. 5. Ts to Local Registrar ---> Ts to RG ---> Photocopy on Certificate. 6. Transcript from Archives or LDS FHC. 7. Photocopy from Archives or LDS FHC.	No No No No No Yes

The Sawyers Case

The present system does not easily allow the researcher to obtain the necessary primary evidence in the form of a photocopy of the original document. Some registrars willingly provide photocopies when asked, others quote 'regulations' which forbid them to do so. Consider this ridiculous situation that I encountered where two sloppy errors of transcription were made on one certificate.

During an investigation to prove that a man had changed his surname I needed to compare his signature before and after the change. I had no difficulty finding plenty of examples of the former name as he was a curate and signed many parish register entries. Finding an example of the new name he married with was more difficult. As he married in a Register Office the actual signed original (the only primary evidence) was with the Superintendent Registrar. I wrote explaining my problem and asked for a photocopy showing his actual signature. Their 'regulations' allowed only a *certified transcript* (Chart 78). On this the wife's surname was written as SAWYERS but the signature had been transcribed as SAWYER and the first witness as James SAWYERS, who was unknown to me.

Upon a further entreaty including an enquiry regarding the discrepancy in the wife's surname, I received an envelope containing only a tiny piece of paper with a photocopy of just the signatures. They had made an error: she signed as SAWYERS. They had also misread the name of the witness who was actually Jane SAWYERS, the known housekeeper of the curate, but I did get the man's signature that I needed.

Perhaps there was too much egg on their faces to see clearly enough to put in a note of apology about the errors!

It is always better for the researcher to interpret the writing rather than the clerk who doesn't know the family. As a general rule, if a church marriage is involved it is far cheaper and superior evidence to obtain a photocopy of the parish register entry than a certificate. If you do not know the church you may be able to find it from a newspaper report of the wedding.

Or you can get the certificate first, then apply for a parish register photocopy after it comes. This way you get the primary evidence and the actual signatures of your ancestors. Most of the church marriage registers, as well as some Marriage Notice Books for register office marriages are now deposited in the local County Record Office or Archives, and thus copies can be obtained from them, or by using the Request for Photocopies Form when they are on the FHLC.

CHART 78:

Marriage Certificate of Edward JAMES KELLY & Alice SAWYERS 1897 with Errors

Registration District Kingston on Thames
1897 **Marriage solemnized at** The Register Office **in the**
District of Kingston on Thames **in the** Counties of Surrey and Middlesex

#	When Married	Name & Surname	Age	Condition	Rank or Profession	Residence	Father's name & surname	Rank or Profession of Father
13	24 Sep 1897	Edward James KELLY	44	Bach	Commercial Traveller	7 St. Leonard Rd Surbiton	John KELLY (deceased)	Clerk
		Alice SAWYERS	26	Spin	----	7 St. Leonard Rd Surbiton	Alexander SAWYERS (deceased)	Builders Foreman

Married in the Register Office **by** Certificate **by me** Ricd Truscott Saule Deputy Registrar J. Edgell, Supt Reg.

This marriage Edward James Kelly **was solemnized between us** Alice Sawyer

In the Presence of us James Sawyers, Edith Emily Gardiner

OBTAINING A CERTIFICATE

Finding the Modern Office

The cost of obtaining these vital certificates from the Postal Applications Section of the General Register Office, plus bank charges for those abroad unless you use a credit card, is significantly more than the price of personal applications in London.

The less well-known, inexpensive alternative of using the District Register Offices has been hampered in the past by the difficulty of ascertaining which modern offices are responsible for the hundreds of discontinued or renamed offices which are encountered in the indexes.

The author's book *Using Register Offices for English & Welsh Certificates* is the first to supply a list of all Registration Districts that have ever existed directly cross-referenced to their modern equivalents and current addresses. In addition there is a chart showing the current Districts arranged by 'old counties', (pre-1974, those used for genealogical purposes), to assist in identification of ancestral areas. For those hard-to-decipher District names, there are three sections giving alphabetical listings within Volume Numbers, which correspond to Regions. Users of this volume save hundreds of dollars in the course of their research.

Note: There is a site on the Internet that gives modern Superintendent Registrar's addresses. It relies on public input for address changes and unfortunately most of the addresses and information is a few years out-of-date.

Obtaining Isle of Man Certificates

All pre-1960s indexes and registrations are obtainable on microfilm. The indexes give sufficient detail to enable registrations to be ordered for 25¢ US on the Request for Photocopies form from the Family History Library in Salt Lake City. Certificates are also available for approximately £5.60 + search fee of £2.75 per year of indexes searched (if you don't provide these details), from:

Civil Registry
Registries Building, Deemsters' Walk
Bucks Road, Douglas
Isle of Man IM1 3AR

Obtaining Channel Islands Certificates

Guernsey

All pre-1960s indexes and registrations are obtainable on microfilm. The indexes give sufficient detail to enable registrations to be ordered for 25¢ US on the Request for Photocopies form from the Family History Library in Salt Lake City. However, bear in mind that the whole island is so small that up to three generations of a family may be on one registration film, it may be worth your while to order the film.

For later events, or instead of the above, certificates cost approximately £5 with or without index details and can be ordered from:

The Registrar General
The Greffe, Royal Court House, St. Peter Port
Guernsey, Channel Islands GY1 2PB

Jersey

Since none of the certificates are available on microfilm there is only one method of getting a copy. It costs approximately £7 plus postal charge (£1 airmail), plus £5 per 5 year search charge for birth or death, or £10 per 5 year search for a marriage. Contact:

The Registrar
10 Royal Square, St. Helier, Jersey, Channel Islands
JE2 4WA
Telephone: 01534-502335

Obtaining Lundy Island Certificates

These are treated as foreign registers and are in the Public Record Office in RG32 – RG35.

Payment

You can pay from approximately £6.50 to £27.00 for the same certificate, as shown in Chart 79. You also need to factor in your outward postage costs, and travel time and costs for you or your agent, where applicable. If the GRO does the search, you are limited to a three-year period unless you pay an extra £3 for each further three-year period.

CHART 79:
Fees for Certificates in England & Wales

Source	Index Details Needed	Cost	Refund if Not Found	Take Credit Cards
Local Supt Registrar	Yes, but 3-year search included. Many include more searching	£6.50 + mail cost*	Full £6.50	A few offices and more in future
In person at FRC London	Yes	£6.50	£3.50	Yes
	No + For each check made	£3.00		
	Yes. Priority, pick up next workday	£22.50		
Via agent at FRC London	Yes	£8–£10	£3.50	A few
	No + For each check made	Over £10 £3		
	Yes. Priority pick up next workday	About £25		
By mail GRO Southpor	Yes	£8.00	£3.50	Yes
	No, but only 3 years searched. Each further 3 year search	£11 £3	£6.50	
	Yes, Priority, mailed next workday	£24.00	£3.50	
	No. Priority, mailed next workday	£27.00	£6.50	

* Include SAE, with an IRC or airmail postage (currently 45p for one certificate, 65p for two) with your request. Note that IRCs (International Reply Coupons), obtainable from post offices worldwide and redeemable in any other country for an airmail stamp, are usually much more expensive than a stamp. It is better to buy a supply of stamps from any British Post Office by mail. Only use IRCs if you have an excess supply on hand from your own correspondents.

It should be noted that the Family History Library in Salt Lake City has now discontinued its former certificate provision service from London.

How to Send Money

Send money *in sterling*, since British bank exchange charges are very high. It may be cheaper to get a sterling money order or draft from a Credit Union or the Post Office if your, (or a senior citizen friend's), bank plan doesn't provide them free. Some family historians maintain a British bank account and can thus write cheques on it to cover certificates and other purchases from Britain.

To Local Superintendent Registrars

Sterling drafts or money orders should be made payable to *The Superintendent Registrar* unless indicated otherwise in *Using Register Offices for English & Welsh Certificates*.

Superintendent Registrars' offices are run by their respective county, borough, or city government. Few accept credit cards at the moment but this situation is changing rapidly and these are indicated in the above publication. Omitting a specific county or district name on your payment means that if your certificate cannot be provided, this payment can be used in another district, thus saving you bank conversion charges.

If you are sending for two or more certificates, send separate money orders/drafts/cheques for each. This makes life easier for the registrar in case she doesn't have one of them. She can then just return one of your payments, rather than have to go through the tedious, and sometimes lengthy, business of having a refund written up.

To GRO in Southport

- Sterling drafts or money orders should be made payable to *ONS*.
- Telephone orders are accepted at +44 (0)151 471 4816 with a credit card payment.
- E-mail orders can be sent to: Certificate.services@ons.gov.uk
- But this involves sending your credit card details by ordinary e-mail, which is *not* advisable. Instead, send the first order by snail mail with your credit card particulars. In subsequent orders by e-mail just quote your first order number and they can find your credit card particulars from their records. Note that this means that they are keeping your credit card information in their files, and you may not wish this to happen.
- You can also download a form from the GRO website found at www.statistics.gov.uk/registration/default.as

Addressing Your Letter

The Superintendent Registrar
The Register Office
(address from *Using Register Offices for English & Welsh Certificates*)

Or, if you have to use the GRO:

General Register Office
P.O. Box 2, Southport
Merseyside, England PR8 2HH

Using the Local Register Offices

Advantages

- Cheapest postal method.
- Full refund if unavailable or they can't find the certificate. *Compare this with GRO* who charge an administration fee of approximately £4.50 if they can't find the certificate. Note that they also state on their website that 'amounts under £5.00 are not refundable overseas!'
- Usually receive a transcript of the original. A few offices can produce photocopies of the original.
- *Compare this with the GRO* who can *only* produce transcripts, or photocopies of transcripts, and frequently send transcripts of transcripts of transcripts! The possibility for error is thereby increased and at least 1 in 40 certificates from this source has an error on it!

- Speedy service. Turn-around times of 4 days to 4 weeks to North America, but typically 7-10 days.
- *Compare this with GRO* whose turn-around is typically 6-8 weeks, and is often several months.
- Superintendent Registrars are some of the most helpful people around. Most of them go beyond the call of duty for family historians. They will check details if you are unsure if you have the correct entry. If you have, for example, an exact birth date, or the name of father, then you can ask them to check and *only* send the certificate if it is the correct one. You will get a *full refund* if it is not, compared to the partial refund from the GRO.
- If details of an event cannot be found on the national indexes, and there are thousands that are not there or not recognizable when they are, then the local registrar can come to the rescue. If you know the district then write for the certificate, enclosing money. They have the originals so are able to produce certificates for all duly registered events.
- They, and church marriage books, are the only source of *original certificates* containing the *actual signatures* of your ancestors. The copy that your ancestor brought home from the wedding or birth/death registration is just that—a copy. The photocopy obtained from the GRO is *not a photocopy of the original*, but only of a copy, (and sometimes of a copy of a copy of a copy!) Imagine the errors that could creep in during this sequence Local registrars can also help with interpretation of place names and possible spelling or pronunciation of personal names.

- They can also suggest nearby districts where sets of registrations have been sent during one of the periodic reorganizations of districts. If the sub-district that you need is not part of their current holdings, then they will forward letters to neighbouring districts as part of their service.
- Local offices may contain fuller indexes to the names and variants of names, than the national indexes. For example, in marriage indexes they may index widows by both maiden name and former married name.

Hints For Successful Searches Through Register Offices

- Make your letter as short as possible but include all relevant facts that may help them find your certificate.
- It is always helpful to state an area or parish if known to you. If you have found the entry in the national index, state the district as this will narrow their search to certain registers. If you also know the parish, area or village then give it since it speeds up the search. The *Volume* and *Page Number* from the national index will not be of any use to the local registrar as there may be a different index system. I usually give it in brackets just to indicate that I have found an entry there, so they *should* be able to as well.

- If you have not actually found a registration in the national index then *do state the source of your information* as this helps them narrow their search. For example, a different range of birth years would be searched from a christening date than from an estimate of age from a death certificate. I prefer to state the three years that I want searched, since then I know what exactly has been checked.
- Be careful about giving occupations as checking factors; they can be described in many ways. For example, if you knew he was a carpenter, but the certificate says joiner then it would not necessarily be recognized as the same thing. Such errors have been found to occur much more frequently at the GRO, probably because the young clerks are not familiar with all the terminology. The local registrars provide more personalized attention and most *really care* that you get the correct certificate, offering suggestions as to alternative certificates, with names or occupations, that might be the ones you need.
- Send your E-mail address (and telephone number if you live in Britain) so they can follow up any queries.
- If you are unsure that you have the correct office, it is wise to add, "If your office does not hold this record kindly forward to the appropriate Registrar." The local Superintendents really are most helpful and know their areas well. *Compare this with the GRO* who seem to have a perpetual problem in training and retaining suitable staff. Their service is often indifferent to us, and one really cannot be sure whether they have searched thoroughly.

For example, if you have asked for a check that the father is William, and it turns out to be William John then they assume it is incorrect.

- *A few* local registrars do not supply marriage certificates unless you supply the date and place, but they are in the minority. The reason is that although each register book is indexed itself, for most, no union index exists; a fact that North Americans find incredible! If the family historian did know the parish, then they would be going straight to the parish registers for marriages, as outlined above, and not for an expensive certificate! In Portsmouth, in what must be a typical example, a marriage search involves looking in 95 *sets* of registers:
  - 1 Register office
  - 37 Church of England
  - 9 [armed] service establishments
  - 17 Methodist premises
  - 6 United Reford
  - 8 Baptist
  - 5 Catholic
  - 12 others

  For the period 1837 to 1966 nearly one half of the marriages took place in either the register office or the ancient parish church of St. Mary. When sending for marriages your chances of success with the local Superintendent Registrars will be better if you can suggest an area even if not a specific parish, and the denomination, which can be found from family knowledge or a newspaper report of the event.

- Some local register offices deserve praise for computerizing and providing three union indexes for births, marriages and deaths, and for offering good reading room facilities for family historians. The outstanding initiative recently inaugurated in Cheshire, soon to be followed by Sussex, of putting the newly created indexes on the net seems almost revolutionary!
- Although the regulations for storage and dissemination of information and prices come from the British Government, each county or borough system organizes its facilities its own way. Some counties such as Leicestershire and North Yorkshire have centralized their whole system into one office for postal services.
- An illuminating article describing the life of present-day Registrars and Superintendent Registrars has been published by Martin. They have to balance the huge volume of registrations and applications for certificates by the living with those seeking after their kindred dead.

Disadvantages of Using Register Offices

- Most local registrars do not have the equipment needed to photocopy their original material onto the certificate forms. Challenging regulations from the GRO prevent them from making an ordinary photocopy of the original material. It's about time these changed; there are no such regulations in Scotland or Ireland! However, many local registrars are sympathetic to the needs of serious researchers for primary evidence and will provide such a photocopy. It never hurts to ask for one.
- Most local Registration Districts do not yet accept credit cards but this is changing rapidly. However the GRO do accept telephone orders and credit card payments which can be a boon to many people.
- If you require a certificate from the Overseas Indexes (Foreign and Armed Forces) then you will have to go through the GRO. There is further information about these Overseas Registers at www.statistics.gov.uk/registration/default.asp, the GRO website. It has recently come to my attention that a very few local Superintendent Registrars are choosing to discontinue processing postal applications. So far this only applies to Hackney and Westminster. The statutory provisions do not actually require them to handle postal applications, and they are legally entitled to refuse such requests if their workload and staffing do not permit them to handle them.

- Some claim that their regular applications have increased considerably with new requirements for birth certificates for issuance of student loans, child passports, and new-style driving licences, (some of the latter also requiring marriage certificates). The busiest times for serving the living at register offices are from March to September, so postal applications received during winter months are more likely to be accommodated speedily.

Only use the GRO as a last resort!

Request for Photocopies Form

Certificates

Pre-1960s Isle of Man and Guernsey certificates, as well as many Scottish and Irish ones, may be obtained through the FHL in Salt Lake for 25¢ each by using the Request for Photocopy form.

Index Pages

Photocopies of index pages for all parts of Britain except Jersey may also be obtained in the same way. This service is available for any years microfilmed by the LDS church and these can be checked in their catalogue (FHLC) on CD or at their website at www.familysearch.org

There are two free *Request for Photocopies* forms; the one needed for civil registration items is stock # 31768. The forms should be at your FHC or can be ordered in packets of 100 (free) from:

Salt Lake Distribution Centre
1999 West 1700 South
Salt Lake City
Utah 84101-4233, USA
or other regional LDS Distribution Centers

This method can be used for up to 8 entries in any one section of the form for a fee of $2 US, thus each page costs 25¢ US.

You are limited to one form every 2 weeks and your form is returned to you with the copies. Instructions for mailing and payment are on the front of the form. Nowadays you only need fill out your name, address and phone number. The simplest method of payment is to include two US $1 bills (notes).

This method of access to the vast holdings of the Family History Library is particularly appreciated by those who are patrons of small Family History Centers. Only the larger ones have reader/printers and long runs of index films. For the latter, first get copies of index pages, then use them to decide which films to order using this method, or to get from other sources if the originals have not been microfilmed. It is wonderful for those who cannot get to a FHC at all but who do have access to the LDS Internet website at www.familysearch.org where they can look up film numbers.

Another use for this kind of search is to make up for deficiencies in the fiche or film version of the index that you are using. England & Wales indexes are available from 1837-1980 on film, and also from 1837-1983 on fiche. Many of the fiche pages of the indexes are missing or are unreadable because they are out of focus or suffer from ink bleeding on the page. You can apply for a copy of the page from the film version instead. Similarly many of the old filmed pages are too dark to read, or possibly too faded. In this case, apply for a copy of the fiched page.

Form 31768 has a portrait (vertical) format with 4 sections. Use the *General Microfilm and Microfiche* section as indicated in Chart 80. When doing a marriage index search first specify a range of years and quarters for the rarest name. On the next application request a copy of the other name from the year and quarter where you found the first spouse. When requesting a copy of a certificate (registration) ensure that you give the certificate film number, **not** the index film number, plus the identifying page etc. from the index. The system is run by volunteers and they are prepared to find a certain film and a certain page on that film, but are not expected to do searches for you. The 25¢ method is **not yet** applicable to English & Welsh certificates as the British Government has not declared them historic, so they have not yet been microfilmed by the LDS church. As evidenced in the genealogical press, the government may soon modernize this archaic practice. I find it hard to believe that my ancestor's 1837 death is considered a modern event!

CHART 80:
How to Fill Out Photocopy Requests for Civil Registration

The first example shows marriage index search of four quarters of 1840 in England & Wales. The second example shows birth index and subsequent certificate search for Guernsey. The third example shows death index and subsequent certificate search for Isle of Man.

Film # & Item #	Name of Individual	Title, parents/ spouse etc.	Date	Place	Page etc.
0506971	Christian Charles DASHWOOD	Marriage	1840-1Q	England & Wales	DASHWOOD
0506972	"	Marriage	1840-2Q	"	"
0506974	"	Marriage	1840-3Q	"	"
0506975	"	Marriage	1840-4Q	"	"
0473775	DARTNELL	Births	1840-1966	Guernsey C.I.	All pages for DARTNELL
0473989	Lily Elizabeth DARTNELL	Births	4 Jan 1889	Guernsey C.I	Parish 1 Folio 522 No. 5
0454954	WEIR	Births Vol A	1863-65	Isle of Man	All pages for W
0454965	James Hugh WEIR	Birth	1864	Ramsey Isle of Man	20

Full details of years available for Ireland and Scotland can be found in the books *Researching Your Irish Ancestors* and *Researching Your Scottish Ancestors*. For details of how to fully utilize the FHLC readers are referred to the book *Research at the Family History Center*.

SPECIAL HELP

Guild of One-Name Studies

Members of the Guild of One-Name Studies (GOONS) collect all references to their chosen name and its variants. There are well over 2,000 British surnames registered so far and these can be seen in the current edition of The GOONS Register, (17th edition 2001), which should be available at major genealogical libraries or from the address below. The Register is also available in searchable form at www.one-name.org

Members are expected, among other things, to have a complete list of all civil registration index entries for England & Wales, and many have them on searchable and printable databases. For example, I am the member registered for BRICKETT, CHOWINGS, DARTNELL, DASHWOOD, and JUPP as well as all variants of these names. I can supply a list of, say:

- ✓ All Jupp births in Horsham district 1840-1870
- ✓ All marriages of Bricketts in Edmonton district
- ✓ All deaths of Henry Dartnell 1837-1998

Members are happy to provide details to anyone related to persons of their surname, at no charge other than some assistance with photocopying and postage charges if necessary. In exchange, they will expect you to provide your linkage and details, which they can add to their database.

If your name is registered this could save you umpteen hours of searching the indexes, and could prove a genealogical gold mine of other, inexpensive information as well.

Further information about GOONS can be obtained from the website or from:

Hon Secretary, **GOONS**
Box G, 14 Charterhouse Buildings
Goswell Road, London EC1M 7BA

Those who would like to set up a One-Name Study can get good advice from the book *One-Name Study*.

FreeBMD

This is a laudable enterprise to put the Birth, Marriage and Death indexes for England & Wales from 1837 to 1900 on a searchable database with free Internet access (Laurie). It is run entirely by volunteers, but with the blessing of the General Register Office, and at the time of writing over 5 percent have been entered. It can be found at www.freebmd.rootsweb.com/ and is well worth a visit and well worth contributions of time and effort. Remember though to be cautious about numbers of marriages per page.

The FreeBMD project is great but it will only make the current, highly unreliable indexes more easily searched. There are other efforts being made to completely re-index from the original materials, and these are described next.

Cheshire Index Initiative

In a highly commendable local effort, the forward-looking Cheshire Register Offices, in collaboration with the Family History Societies in Cheshire, have started putting transcribed indexes of their older records on the Internet (Hartas & Langston). In 2000 they started by inputting Marriages giving year, surname and given name, spouse's surname and given name, place and their own registration code for ordering a certificate. At the time of writing there are 1,117,880 entries partially covering 1837 to 1950 so far included. They intend to follow with the deaths. They have some very detailed and clearly written instructions and guidelines. Not surprisingly there has been an overwhelmingly positive response. All this can be found at www.CheshireBMD.org.uk Other registrars are interested so we will likely see more online very soon. Well done Cheshire!

This kind of initiative would be most prized by Welsh researchers who have the greatest difficulties sorting out many common names. Adding the parish of marriage and coupling the spouses would be of inestimable value in Wales where:

- 1 in 30 women was named Elizabeth Jones
- 1 in 21 women was named Mary Jones
- 1 in 23 men was named John Jones

as shown by Foster (sample of 1183 Welsh marriages).

As a sideline, the pessimists who feel that putting more index information on the net would decrease revenues for the government office concerned, have been confounded in British Columbia. This provincial government decided to release indexes of its historic birth (over 100 years), marriage (75 years) and death (20 years) *Vital Statistics* registrations on fiches as well as at www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/index on the Internet. They have also availed themselves of the free services of the GSU to film the original registrations, which contain more information than on their certificates. Inexpensive photocopies of these registrations are now available through archives and public libraries across Canada, as well as on film through the LDS. As an unforeseen consequence the sales of *modern certificates* zoomed bringing welcome funds to the treasury (Massey).

Campaign for Historicity

Family History Magazine and Anthony Camp, former Director of the Society of Genealogists and President of the Federation of Family History Societies, have spearheaded the campaign for easier and cheaper access to older civil registration records. Details can be seen in articles by Armstrong and Camp from 1998 onwards.

This stems from the ludicrous situation where 163-year-old records (and some are even 240 years old) are still considered modern documents and are closed to public scrutiny unless a certificate is purchased. The lethargy of the British Government in dealing with this issue really strains one's credulity.

What is needed is a sensible cut-off date for modern documents and for the older ones to be declared historic. They would thus take their place with similar vintage material at the Public Record Office where they can be made more easily available there and anywhere in the world on microfilm.

The privacy of living individuals needs to be respected, naturally, and the 75-year suggestion for births, marriages and deaths could be uncomfortable for those over this age. On the other hand, why is a death certificate such a state secret for that long? In Canada, where civil registration is under provincial jurisdiction, my own province of British Columbia releases births after 100 years, marriages after 75 and deaths after 20 years.

These periods seem to me to better reflect sensitivity towards the living. A glimmer of hope for progress towards a system reflecting the needs of genealogists is contained in a recent ONS advert for extra staff to implement changes. It says, in part, "Delivering the required changes to the current system will be challenging as it involves significant legislative, organizational and IT development. Success in doing so will provide a civil registration service fit for the 21st century." And "The programme will start late 2001 and run through to implementation during 2005" (Dartnell).

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Description of Worksheets

Civil Registration Index Search

A form on which to plan a search for a birth, marriage or death certificate by highlighting the required span of years to cover, and also to record your progress by checking off each quarter as you go.

Civil Registration – England & Wales – Births 1837-1910

A form to properly record entries found during a search for early births.

Civil Registration – England & Wales – Births 1911 to date

A form to properly record entries found during a search for later births.

Civil Registration – England & Wales – Marriages 1837-1911

A form to properly record entries found during a search for early marriages.

Civil Registration – England & Wales – Marriages 1912 to date

A form to properly record entries found during a search for later marriages.

Civil Registration – England & Wales – Deaths 1837-1865

A form to properly record entries found during a search for early deaths.

Civil Registration – England & Wales – Deaths 1866 to date

A form to properly record entries found during a search for later deaths.

CIVIL REGISTRATION INDEX SEARCH

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Quarter	Year	Surname	Given Name (s)	District	Volume	Page

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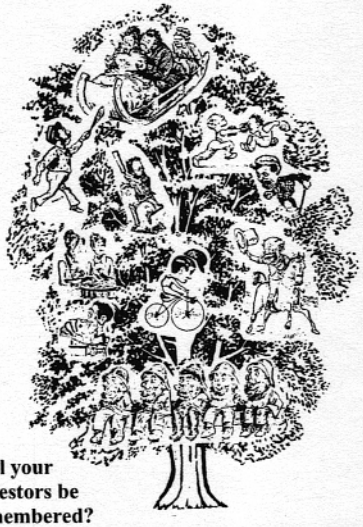

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